

 You know it's a sad day when this headline actually becomes a reality.

There was a time in January 2010 when the University of Texas men's basketball team was 17-0 and atop the national rankings. Number one. They were typically going 10-deep on the roster without any loss of quality or production.

They were a can't miss Final Four team if ever I've seen one.

And now? After staggering into the NCAA tournament, this same team was eliminated in the first round by a Wake Forest team that subsequently had its proverbial backside handed to it by Kentucky one day later.

Texas is one of only five teams in NCAA history to have been #1 and then unranked. That's not a statistic of which we should be proud. But there are plenty of reasons for their demise this season, and they start from the top.

Their final game was a fitting reflection of the past 10 weeks. The defense was sloppy at best - players were strolling around and showed little desire to play with any sense of urgency. They played offense much like kids would do in the school yard. Forget about the team, it's all about me. I'm going to make the play that gets on the highlight reel.

And therein lies the issue. Good teams just don't behave like that. If you doubt that, then take a look at Northern Iowa, St. Mary's, and Cornell - three teams that are headed to the Sweet 16 based on solid first- and second-round team efforts.

To be fair, losing guards Varez Ward and Dogus Balbay to injury certainly didn't help. The way that Ward was playing at the end of last season, I fully expected him to pick up a lot of slack this year. Scratch that idea. Balbay's defense was solid, but his lack of a jump shot on offense made him a minimal threat to most defenses. Nonetheless, injuries certainly didn't help the equation.

Was this really a Final Four team that lost its way? I would have sworn in January that they were so deep that they had to go to the Final Four. A loss or two in January and February wouldn't have been a bad thing. Coach Barnes has always had tournament-ready teams that played their best in the latter part of the season. But now, in hindsight, those big wins against Michigan State (Sweet 16), North Carolina (NIT), and Pittsburgh (out in Round 2) just don't seem so big anymore.

The level of discipline was abysmal. There are high school teams in this city that work the ball around better, and certainly pass better and with greater frequency, than these Horns. But that would require being unselfish with the ball. Speaking of which, Jovan Brown may have tremendous skills, but frankly he strikes me as being a problem waiting to explode. As the season wore on, he was still playing as though the game was all about his own personal highlight film. A similar vibe exists with Jordan Hamilton, who along with Brown just looked plain lazy on defense.

Coach [Rick Barnes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rick_Barnes "Rick Barnes") had a great idea to get solid minutes from Matt Hill and Clint Chapman - then promptly sat them down when they were playing well.

Damion James came back to campus for his senior year. Unfortunately, he would soon discover that the cast of supporting characters just wasn't there. I can't imagine that his draft stock went up based on his final game's no-show.

And then there is Dexter Pittman. Ahh Dexter. The enigma you were this year. Prior to January, you had game. After January, your game went lame. Your lackadaisical performance against Wake Forest, in which you missed a layup, followed by 2 or 3 attempts at a tip-in (which should have been a thunder dunk ala [Darryl Dawkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darryl_Dawkins "Darryl Dawkins")!) was a perfect summary to the latter part of the season.

Let us not forget the free throw

shooting. It's a 15 foot shot that you've been taking since you were in middle school what makes it so difficult now? Strangely enough, it improved towards the end of the season. But in the game against Wake Forest, in overtime, Texas took a quick 8 point lead, only to watch it disappear with 4 missed OT free throws by Johnson and Brown. Oh and let's not forget the ones that Damion James missed at the end of regulation which would have sealed the deal without ever going to OT in the first place.

There were some high points. Avery Bradley is a star in the making - a freshman star, but a star nonetheless. Avery, stay in school it will help your game immensely. Gary Johnson really brought his A game in the latter part of the season as well. Justin Mason, we'll be sad to see your defense leave Austin.

Though the individual level of play and discipline was pathetic at times, the buck does stop with the coach, the man who has the task of motivating a group to succeed. And sadly, Barnes has not had much to show except for a few high draft picks and one Final Four appearance. Can he get us to the dance regularly? Sure. But can he win a national championship? I suspect not, given how we've watched this talented group of players get squandered this season.

Early in the season, Coach Barnes was rotating 10 players into the game which seemed like a great concept. But this soon evolved into a deer in the headlights look on the sidelines throughout the better part of the past couple of months. Who do we put in now? Leadership and discipline start from the coach, and if the coach isn't quite sure what to do, then what?

Many of the [Big 12 Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_12_Conference) teams took advantage of the tough Big 12 schedule to become battle-tested in time for the Big Dance. Baylor and Kansas State look like solid Final 4 options. Missouri had West Virginia on the ropes, and Texas A&M let a win slip away against Purdue. Oklahoma State almost found themselves in the second round. And Texas? They barely made the trip to the Big Easy.

But they are in good company. Kansas and Texas are both heading home within days of each other. Two fine examples of underachieving teams with very different paths home but the net result is the same.

Maybe it's time for the Longhorns program to go with a new coach that can get the best out of his players. Here's a thought how about Ben Jacobsen of Northern Iowa? He's got a fearless team that's in the sweet 16. And he knows how to beat Kansas something that Rick Barnes hasn't been able to do consistently over the years, even though he's tried to do so with far more talent and resources available to him.

In the meantime, March Madness is proving to be just that once again. Time to watch Cornell go to the Final Four! Go Big Red!

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