

2007-2008 Season Recap Part 1

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The North Texas 2007-2008 season was largely a continuation of the success of the historic 2006-2007 campaign. The Mean Green again won 20 games, only the 5th time in school history we reached that plateau. Newcomers blossomed and veterans continued quality careers. It was an up and down year for NT as numerous winning streaks & losing streaks were the norm. In the end a return trip to postseason was not in the offing – but we have a lot to be proud of nonetheless.

The Conference Championship from the previous year got the fanbase excited from the get go. Normally the season opener against a school like Cameron wouldn't draw well, but the crowd for the lid lifter on November 10th 2007, was over 3 thousand. The banners celebrating the NCAA big and conference title were raised to the rafters. Then the Mean Green annihilated an overmatched Cameron squad 106-53. Foreshadowing later successes Collin Dennis, Tristan Thompson, and Josh White all had great games. In fact the entire roster scored. It was a nice warm up for the next game which would highlight our non conference home slate.

The Oklahoma State Cowboys are one of the more storied programs in college basketball history. Their rich lore dates back to the 1930's when Coach Iba strolled the sidelines. They boast 2 NCAA titles from the 1940's as well as two Final Four appearances in recent years. The Mean Green faithful turned out in force as more than 6700 fans filled the SuperPit for the clash. OSU brought a big crowd, but Eagles in the stands definitely provided a great home court advantage. The Pit Crew had the old barn rocking throughout the night.

The game started like a heavyweight bout with each team feeling the other out. We had a hard time getting the ball into the paint in the opening minutes and Keith Wooden seemed a bit frustrated. With Oklahoma State up 16-15, White and Harold Stewart spearheaded a 17-0 run that put the SuperPit into a near frenzy. Oklahoma State managed to whittle the 16 point margin to 9 by halftime. The 2nd stanza opened up with the teams trading baskets until a 9-0 run by the Cowboys cut the lead to one. Wooden scored the next 6 by himself and we were off and running. OSU never came closer than four after that and despite tense moments throughout – we controlled the second half. Keith down low and Josh (who chipped a couple of teeth) played magnificently, carrying the squad. Each contributed 25 in the 82-73 final. The signature moment was reserved for Harold, whose windmill dunk in the closing seconds put the cherry on top. The students rushed the court after the buzzer and Josh was hoisted up on shoulders as the celebration continued for some time after the game. Johnny Jones had his signature non conference win.

Following the emotional victory, our next just days later seemed an obvious let down game. Fortunately for us the squad seemed ready and defeated the Indiana State Sycamores 78-69. Collin Dennis spearheaded the charge with 22 points and Quincy Williams dominated the boards with 19 rebounds. North Texas at one time held a 18 point lead in the second half but ISU fought back to make a game of it in the last few minutes. Senior transfer Dez Willingham iced the game at the line and we improved to 3-0 for the first time in over a decade. Confidence was growing by leaps and bounds in the Mean Green Nation.

NT went on the road for the first time right before Thanksgiving and ran into an old nemesis. The Texas-Arlington Moving Mavs once again frustrated us by winning 82-74. Their zone crippled our 3 point shooting and our guards could never seem to penetrate the defense. Only shooting 9 free throws also hurt our cause as our overall field goal percentage was less than desired. This loss stung, as they've owned us in recent years. However, by season's end UTA showed they were a solid squad by winning the Southland conference tourney and qualifying for the NCAA's.

Up next was the Lou Henson Classic. Our first opponent in the round robin tournament was Western New Mexico. WNMSU made 12 from behind the arc and pushed us to the limit. Wooden, Bell, and White all posted double figures as we held on for a 2 point win, when their last second shot sailed wide.

The host school NMSU was the following opponent. This was one of the more remarkable games of the season. The Aggies blitzed us in the first half and took an 18 point advantage to the break. Things became even grimmer as NMSU increased the margin to 21 early in the second half. Collin Dennis exploded for 19 in just a few minutes as we roared back, finally taking the lead with about five minutes to go. We held on for a 75-72 win. In retrospect, this was really a great win as the Aggies were regular season co-champions of the WAC.

Texas had just knocked off UCLA when we went into Austin to face the top 5 Longhorns. UT got off to a fast 17-3 start and we seemed lost. Slowly but surely we worked our way into the game and would not let the Horns run away with it. White had 28 as he almost single handedly brought us back in the 2nd half. A late run by the Longhorns made the final 88-72, but one had to like our effort after they nearly buried us early.

Collin Dennis and Keith Wooden would sit out our next contest. The game against Hartford was reminiscent of the old Loyola Marymount or UNLV teams. Both teams scored early and often as we had 5 players in double figures. Josh led the way with 24, but Ben Bell had a career high 23. Ben also played a key role late in the game to retake the lead twice after Hartford had pushed ahead. It was really a classic back and forth affair with 16 lead changes and 9 ties. The 105-97 win showed the offensive firepower we were capable of.

Southern visited Denton and blew out of the gate to a 12-2 lead. We picked ourselves up and slowly worked our way back into the game eventually taking the lead at 25-24. From that point on North Texas had little trouble as we breezed to a 79-58 win. Four players were in double figures led by Collin's 16.

Our last game before conference began was against the Gentlemen of Centenary. Dez led the team with 14 as we won easily 76-54. Tristan Thompson continued his terrific under the radar play going over double figures for the fourth time of the season. Josh White sat this game out and Bell seemed to relish being the true point guard again. Upon Josh's return in following contests - he would move back to the shooting guard and Ben stayed at the 1 spot.

We were 8-2 at this point and looked to be playing very well. Little did we know the valleys and peaks ahead.