

SPORTS

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ERIC CHENOWITH

By MATTHEW HANSEN
Staff writer

It was another emotionally-charged winter night inside Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence, Kan.

KU battled against a talented Texas squad, holding onto the victory despite a late Longhorn charge.

The faithful all agreed: Eric Chenowith's marvelous performance had been the difference in the 76-67 win. The 7-footer had dominated the contest with 20 points, 14 rebounds and three blocks. Defensively, he had frustrated All-American center Chris Mihm into a 6-for-17 shooting performance.

One month later, another capacity crowd threatened the structure of the house that Phog built. The Jayhawks won again, this time breezing by their in-state rivals from Manhattan, Kansas 62-47. The faithful all agreed: The team had played excellent basketball.

But what had happened to Chenowith?

His K-State line: 32 minutes, six shots, no field goals, no points. None.

When asked about Chenowith's up-and-down season, Head Coach Roy Williams stated the obvious.

"In the past, Eric has had a tendency to be a little inconsistent for us at times," he said.

Yes. The enigma that is Eric Chenowith has been alternately awe-inspiring and invisible for KU in the past two seasons. The faithful and Williams talk about Chenowith's potential. They also criticize his weaknesses — Williams does so softly, the faithful louder.

Deep down, though, they know that, by KU standards, the Jayhawks are going nowhere without a consistent Chenowith. His flashes of brilliance must become long stretches. He must battle night in and night out against the talented giants of the Big 12 and the nation and come out on top. In short, he must become mature enough to shoulder the load for the Jayhawks.

Chenowith knows it, too. The 7-2 self-proclaimed "key to the season" sits slumped in a chair, head tilted. His eyes light up when someone asks about his hobby, surfing. He throws out quip after quip on his general flakiness to appreciative reporters.

When asked about consistency, though, his head drops, and he becomes quiet.

"Yeah, I know I have to come into every game ready to play from now on," Chenowith said. "Last year I got real psyched for guys like Mihm and Venson Hamilton. I wasn't ready for some of the other games, and it hurt me and the team."

CHRIS MIHM

By JOSHUA CAMENZIND
Staff writer

Chris Mihm has always been famous in Austin, Texas. So much so that it is now tough for him to show his face in public.

Mihm, the preseason Big 12 Player of the Year in men's basketball, graduated from Westlake High School in Austin where he averaged 22.5 points and 10.7 rebounds.

He then went to Texas as a highly-touted big man and is now beginning to fulfill expectations.

"You get a million questions and since I am a 7-foot giant, the only one on campus, I am pretty recognizable," said Mihm. "So I do get approached a lot, but the student body at UT is great. But sometimes I just don't feel like fielding questions."

Mihm's play in his first two years has been solid, but many are expecting this to be his breakout season.

Texas is promoting Mihm with postcards that are titled, "Chris Mihm: preseason All-America candidate."

Preseason accolades abound for Mihm. He is the conference player of the year as selected by both the coaches and the media. He is listed as the No. 1 center in the nation by many publications and up for the Wooden and Naismith awards — given annually to the best player in the nation.

Mihm's peers are also beginning to notice.

"He's a deceptive post player who knows what he wants to do with the ball," fellow Big 12 center Eric Chenowith said.

A junior, Mihm had a strong season as a sophomore. He averaged 13.7 points and 11 rebounds per game on his way to leading UT to the Big 12 regular season championship.

Mihm realizes that with success comes expectations and the pressure is already building. He said that he can imagine what Heisman Trophy winner Ricky Williams felt last season.

"All of our games are on television, and our faces are seen constantly," Mihm said. "It is tough for me in Austin. I don't go out that much anymore, but I imagine that it is two-

fold for Ricky."

Despite leading the country in double-doubles and leading Texas to the NCAA tournament, Mihm has lacked one thing in his Longhorn career: confidence.

But those who know him best say that that aspect of his game has enjoyed a 180-degree spin.

"He is more confident," fellow front court member Gabe Muoneke said. "I think he is more confident in his ability, and he understands how good he is, and I think that is the biggest difference."

"He is real quick, real strong, and he is fast. He has great offensive moves, and the difference is now that he believes he can dominate people with those moves and stop people on defense."

Mihm said he gained that confidence in his game through his play in the second part of last season and last summer. He competed July 3-12 for the United States in the World University Games in Spain.

"It was a great experience," Mihm said. "To be able to play that caliber of basketball and get that experience during the summer was incredible. I was able to work on my game and get playing experience."

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FACE/OFF

A DN Presentation

Featuring Eric Chenowith Produced by Matthew Hanson and

Featuring Chris Mihm Produced by Joshua Camenzind

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