


The Drum Was Rockin' | Allan Besselink

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 The Erwin Center in Austin is affectionately known as "The Drum" - for all the obvious reasons. The home of the University of Texas Longhorns' men's and women's basketball teams looks like, well, a drum - nothing more, nothing less. It is what you would call a highly un-original moniker, to say the least!

But the Drum was rockin' last night as OU came to town.

In Austin, unless you are from Oklahoma, you learn to love to hate OU. Any event that brings together the schools from either side of the Red River will always bring with it a high level of excitement and passion. They hate us -and we hate them. Pretty simple stuff, actually - and perhaps one of the greatest collegiate rivalries in the United States (in Canada, the equivalent would probably be Queen's University and McGill, but I digress). Though the emphasis has always been on the Red River Rivalry in football, it certainly extends to all sports.

Last night was no different. The Texas-Oklahoma game is a must-see every season. I have now seen 19 of them over the years, and they are always a blast. It doesn't matter where either team is in conference - it's always a must-win, bragging rights game.

The Horns got pounded in Norman a few weeks ago. There is no other way to describe it.

The Sooners came to Austin yesterday ranked #2 in the country. They were most certainly on their way to #1 today with Connecticut's loss this week. Texas has been slumping of late and hasn't had a big win since December or early January - not the way to impress the NCAA tournament selection committee. It was a must win for the Horns.

The Horns came to play. They had a stunning effort in the first half. For 11 minutes, they held Blake Griffin, OU's national player of the year candidate, to 2 points and he grabbed 2 fouls along the way. Then, he went to the bench with an apparent concussion. In those 11 minutes, he looked little more than average and the Sooners suffered for it.

But down the stretch, the Sooners altered their game plan without Griffin on the court. They recovered, and with under two minutes remaining actually had the lead. Fortunately, the Horns were able to seal the deal and came out with a 5 point victory - a win against the #2 team in the country.

It was so much more than that though. Dogus Balbay stepped up ... as did A.J. Abrams. The team played like a team for the first time in ages, and when they struggled early in the second half, they showed the resilience to make a comeback. This was the team that beat Villanova and UCLA earlier in the year. The win almost certainly put them in the NCAA tournament (barring some unforeseen cratering in the Big 12 tournament). And it put them back on stride for the last 4 games of the season.

Beware of the Sooners though - this team has the potential to be a Final Four team with everyone healthy. They had 68 points last night without Griffin - who is usually good for at least 20. And let's face it - 88 points per game would sink most opponents.

But last night was our night - and through it all, the Drum was rockin'!!