Women's basketball looks to shift gears during second week

Team needs to take step forward

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Rick Insell sees advancement each time his team steps onto the practice court. The veteran Middle Tennessee head women's basketball coach just isn't seeing as much evolution as he would like with the season opener in the Preseason WNIT just around the corner.

- **Photos:** Preseason photo gallery

The Blue Raiders play their first of two exhibition games against Lincoln Memorial at Murphy Center Nov. 3, and they play host to Lafayette in the opening round of the Preseason WNIT Nov. 15, and Middle Tennessee has a great deal yet to accomplish before the opener. "We are kind of in-between right now," Insell said. "When you get through with practice there are so many things you have not covered and then you go into the next day and you find out that you have a great deal more stuff you still have to cover. It's a never-ending battle trying to make sure all of your players understand what you want to get accomplished and what they are doing within the framework of the team." Junior forward Brandi Brown says one advantage the team has and needs to utilize is the fact that more than half the roster includes players who have been in the program and should have a grasp of what Insell and his staff expects. "We have quite a few players who have been here and know what to do and how to practice but we have to do a better job of putting that together as a team," said Brown, who has been impressive throughout the first week of preseason practice. "Once everyone has a better understanding of what they are supposed to do and where they are supposed to be then we can start moving ahead as a team because we can put those

individual parts together and become more of a cohesive unit." Insell said strides have been made through the first week but added players stepping their game up a notch is critical entering the second week of workouts. "We still have a lot to cover and we still have plenty of time," Insell said. "We are starting to work on some more things offensively and that's exciting, but we can't forget our defense and rebounding because I think those are two of the weaknesses we have right now. We are going to work hard and try to make those our strengths." **TIME TO STEP UP**
With six newcomers among Middle Tennessee's 11-player roster it figures some of the new faces are going to have to play a greater role earlier than later. Two such players are freshman Tina Stewart and junior Dana Garrett. The quandary is they aren't where they need to be at this point in the preseason considering how much Insell will lean on them at the outset of the season. "Right now we don't have Tina and Dana necessarily where they need to be with us going into our exhibition games and that concerns me because we are going to have to count on them to step up early," Insell said. "I can wait a little longer on some of our other (newcomers) but Dana and Tina has to step up from the first month of games for us to have any kind of chance as far as our depth and athleticism are concerned." Experience among the top five players, along with transfer Alysha Clark, is not a concern but the lack of experience on the bench could be until reserves begin to not only develop into their roles but grasp a better understanding of Insell's philosophies. "We have to continue to bring players along and we have to take a sense of urgency to the practice floor but there is a fine line there," Insell said. "You don't want the competitive juices to be such that you hurt two or three because we can't afford for anyone to go down injured right now." **THEY WANT TO BE GOOD**
One characteristic that much exist for a team to excel is a willingness to improve and that quality has pleased Insell more than any other during the first week of preseason. "The one thing I can say about this team right now is they are very coachable," Insell said. "When we ask them to do something they do everything within their power to try to do what the staff wants. You can win some games and some championships doing that. They may not think they should be doing everything we tell them but we are the staff and we know what we have to have in order to win. When you see a team like we have right now buying into that then it's a great positive and it's exciting." Sophomore forward Emily Queen debuted with 26 starts during a strong freshman season. The 6-1 post was at her best down the stretch and narrowly missed a double-double in the WNIT with nine points and 10 rebounds against Western Carolina. She enjoyed two double-doubles and led the team in rebounding eight times. Despite her early success the Ashland, Ky., native said there is something new to learn each day. "You can never stop improving or picking up little things that not only can help your game but also help the team as a whole," Queen said. "I believe we have a team with people who want to get better and learn new things each practice. If you focus and apply what you learn at practice you are going to have a chance to improve but you have to be willing to put in the extra work on your own, too, and I see a lot of that happening here." Veterans also have exhibited ownership of the team whether it be coaching newcomers on the floor or giving teammates a necessary push or word of encouragement when the situation calls for it. Junior guard Chelsea Lymon has demonstrated every asset one looks for in a point guard but her greatest trait has been leadership. She provides an additional coach on the court and what's more important is the fact she has the respect, and therefore attention, of teammates. "I believe it is a responsibility to pass along knowledge and information to the younger players and help bring them along," Lymon said. "This is my third year and I'm still learning but I do believe I have an understanding of what Coach Insell expects and how he wants to get it done. I remember what it was like for me as a freshman so every bit of assistance helps. We are going to need these younger players to contribute so we need to do everything we can to help get them ready. It's not just the coach's job; it's all of ours." There are times during practice when Insell stands back and admires what is unfolding before his eyes. "I see

girls out there coaching one another and correcting one another and I just stand there and watch it because it's exciting to see that," Insell said. "That type of leadership is what I'm really excited about right now. You look at Chelsea Lymon, Jackie Pickel, Brandi Brown, Anne Marie Lanning, Emily Queen, Alysha Clark and they are not only trying to take their game up another notch but they are helping each other. They are also helping the new players try to take their game up a notch. When you see that you know you have something special and right now I think we do have something special."

SEASON TICKETS

Season tickets for Middle Tennessee women's basketball are on sale. Reserved season tickets are $100 or a combo package for the men's and women's season tickets can be purchased for $210. Season tickets may be purchased at GoBlueRaiders.com or by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU.

EXHIBITION ON TAP

The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team will play two exhibition games. The first exhibition game will take place against Kentucky Wesleyan, Nov. 3, at Murphy Center, and the final preseason game will be Nov. 10 against Lincoln Memorial at Murphy Center. Both games begin at 7 p.m.

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