Insell inks five in-state products for class of 2013

Three of the five hail from the same AAU program

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee head women's basketball coach Rick Insell and his staff have announced the addition of five student-athletes, all hailing from the Volunteer State, to National Letters of Intent Thursday as part of the NCAA Early Signing Period.

"We have to commend our whole staff because signing these five players was a team effort," noted Insell. "Everyone had some kind of input in the signing of all of them. We are very happy and I do not know what the experts out there are saying about the people we signed but I know what the experts on our staff say that we have signed five young women who are going to mesh right in to what we believe in on both sides of the ball.

"Academically, it is about going to class, being a good student and citizen. All of the players we have signed have those qualities and have come from championship programs with great high school coaches."

Jamila "MiMi" Ajanaku, a 6-1 forward from Memphis Central High School in Memphis, Tenn., played for the Tennessee Flight AAU program. She is ranked as the No. 20 wing nationally by ESPN.com and No. 92 overall by Premier Basketball Reports. As a junior, she averaged 10 points and six rebounds. She helped lead her AAU squad to the 2008 Nike Nationals Championship title.

"She comes from a high school program that has been very successful under head coach Niki Bray. We saw Jamila with her high school team at our team camp and her athleticism in terms of what she could laterally and vertically excited us. She cannot only get up and down the floor but can handle the ball extremely well for a tall player. She fits our game and her upside is tremendous."

Icelyn Elie, a 6-1 forward hailing from Lebanon High School in Lebanon, Tenn., saw action with the Tennessee Elite AAU program. She averaged 17 points and 7.5 rebounds as a junior. She also has been tabbed as a top unknown recruit after displaying her athletic ability on the perimeter and in the post. Her athletic ability stretches beyond the hardwood, as she was an all-state performer in the pentathlon during track & field season.

"She is going to be someone who people will be talking about for a very long time. If you look at some of her statistics one of the more impressive things is how well she has done in the pentathlon. She can do just about anything. She can rebound, guard the post and play the perimeter. She has great lateral speed and can rip the basketball off the boards. Everything about her game excited us and we felt very fortunate to sign her as well as the other four players."

Kortni Jones, a 5-9 point guard product of Oak Ridge High School in Oak Ridge, Tenn., was a teammate of Ajanaku on the 2008 Nike Nationals Championship team, starting for the Tennessee Flight. ESPN.com ranks her as the No. 25 guard nationally following a junior campaign during which she averaged 14 points and six assists. She has already surpassed former Olympic Gold Medalist and Kodak All-American Jennifer Azzi's school record for career assists. The Tennessee Sports Writers Association picked her to its all-state team in 2007. She also has been recognized as an Honorable Mention All-American by Street & Smith's and was tabbed the 2008 District Player of the Year. Rick Bolous placed her on his top-12 Tennessee rising prospect chart and her high school voted her as the 2008 Homecoming Queen.

"We put a list together of five guards we wanted from around the country and the first person on it was Kortni. When she verbeled to us back in August we were very excited and were even more excited when we received her paperwork yesterday. There were a lot of schools that tried to persuade her to not come to Middle Tennessee and go to their schools in the last few weeks but she stayed committed to signing with our program. That says a little about her and her family. She is a good student and can come in and make an impact our team."

Lauren March, a 6-2 forward joins the Blue Raider program after playing at Marshall County High School in Lewisburg, Tenn. She played for the Tennessee Flight Navy AAU team and has been ranked as high as the No. 35 post player nationally by ESPN.com. Her junior year was a productive one, as she averaged 15 points, 11 rebounds, four steals and three assists in leading her high school to the state championship crown. Along the way, she garnered 2008 TSSAA Class AA State Tournament MVP accolades. The TSWA selected her as a 2007 all-state honoree.

"She was the most valuable player of the state tournament. She can slash, knock down the three-pointer and handle the basketball. She gives us someone who has a lot of length that can go from sideline to sideline and up the floor. She is very athletic and has the potential to possibly grow anywhere from one to three more inches. She had a good coach in Boyd West and her high school won the state championship last year. We have a player who can come in and help us next season."

Dymon Raynor, a 6-3 post from Smyrna High School in La Vergne, Tenn., is the third member of

the class hailing from the Tennessee Flight AAU program. She has been listed as high as the No. 39 wing nationally by ESPN.com after averaging 14.8 points and 6.3 rebounds her junior season. She was picked to the all-state squad by the TSWA for her performance. In helping her AAU program to the Nike National Championship title, she was charged with guarding the opponents' top post players. She also has been named to the Next 35 list by Rick Bolous.

"We told Dymon that she was our No. 1 post signing from the onset and the player we wanted the most of all the players we were recruiting around the country. I think that had a lot to do with her committing early. She is strong, physical and has really come into her own in the last few years. When she gets with [strength coach] Matt Riley and develops even more physically and learns what we want as far as our system is concerned, then she is going to make a big impact.

"We are excited about bringing in quality newcomers to a team and we do not lose a player. These five players get to come in and observe our current players. They have some young women in front of them that go to the weight room, are the first ones to the practice floor and work extremely hard. That is going to translate and make an impression to them, like passing a baton. We are going to have these same players that are coming in now that will be passing it to the next set of players. We are here to build not only just a team but also a program.

"The most important thing for our staff is to come back and sign another marquee recruiting class right behind this one. That will give us a great foundation."

Middle Tennessee, coming off an undefeated exhibition slate, will open regular season action during the Preseason WNIT with a 7 p.m. Saturday game against the Lafayette College Leopards inside the Murphy Center.

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