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Blue Raider insight with Coach Rick Insell

Q&A with the head women's basketball coach

Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -- Middle Tennessee head women's basketball coach Rick Insell recently sat down with GoBlueRaiders.com to discuss this season and the upcoming Sun Belt Championships.

QUESTION: This group of seniors has won championships, been in the postseason every year, and beaten ranked teams both at home and on the road. What is left for them to do?

INSELL: We want to get deeper into the NCAA Tournament, to make the Final Four. I know people think that is not a realistic goal, but in my eyes nothing is unrealistic. If we shoot the ball well, play decent defense, get a good draw in the tournament, I think we might surprise a lot of those nay-sayers. We have got a pretty good basketball team, we are a hard match-up for a lot of teams, we shoot the ball well from outside. We have a great point guard in Chelsia (Lymon) and speed at the wings in Jackie (Pickel). We have the intangibles there that make it possible for this group to go deep into the tournament.

QUESTION: What is your fondest memory of this group of seniors?

INSELL: I guess it started at the Maryland game. We had already been here a year when we brought this group in, and we recruited them to the fact that we had been averaging about 250 people a game, but that we were going to build this program to the point where we were averaging about 5,000 a game, and would have 10,000 or 11,000 for some games. For Maryland we had over 10,000, and we had 11,800 for the Tennessee game this year. We talked the talk in recruiting, and walked the walk with those two games.

COMMENT: If the tournament seedings go according to form, you will have to beat Western Kentucky and then UALR on consecutive days. That is not going to be easy.

INSELL: You cannot hand-pick who you want to play. The Sun Belt has got some great teams, and Western and UALR are among the best. But there are other teams like South Alabama, FAU and Denver that are capable of pulling an upset. We will only scout the FIU-North Texas game because that is who we will play. I do not think anyone is a shoo-in to make the finals. Everybody is going to have to earn whatever they get.

QUESTION: Our RPI and rankings would likely get us into the NCAA no matter what. Do you think UALR and Western will have a good shot at postseason play as well?

INSELL: I think Western will have to win the tournament. I do not know about the NIT, but there is a possibility there. Little Rock is in a lot of discussions about bracket busters and bubble teams, things like that. I would love to see us put three teams in postseason play. When we start consistently getting three teams in the postseason, I think you will see our conference RPI rise to about a six or a seven. Do I think that Little Rock and Western are as good as some of the teams that will be put in this year? Absolutely!!

QUESTION: With as well as we are playing now, would you like to take this team back to places like LSU and Xavier to play them again?

INSELL: Those were early season-games and everybody is a little rusty. We did not play well at either LSU or Xavier. It was a non-typical Lady Raider basketball game. We did not have great chemistry, we did not share the basketball, we were in disarray, but that is going to happen to everybody. As a competitor, when someone beats you, you always want to go back and play them again. We are a better basketball team now than we were then, and we are playing well right now.

QUESTION: What are your thoughts on the all-conference team this year, both from the standpoint of honors and omissions?

INSELL: I was pleased with everything that went on. I thought that AC ([Alysha Clark](#)) had to be the runaway of the year for Player of the Year in the conference. She has done it on both ends of the floor all year, night in and night out. I thought that [Brandi Brown](#), our silent assassin, was deserving of her honor. She does so many things for us on both ends of the court. I thought that Jackie had a great year, both offensively and defensively, for us. She led the conference in steals, and also scored big for us a couple of times when AC was out. I am pleased that all three of them made it, but I am disappointed that Chelsia did not make it. I just cannot believe that there are 15 players in the conference that are better than she is. She has played all year with basically one arm. She will have shoulder surgery as soon as the season is over, but she is very tough. Against FAU last week, she had eight steals and seven assists. She is second to Jackie in the conference in steals, and is one of the most important parts of our basketball team.

QUESTION: You knew who your top six players were going to be before the season even started. Who has also impressed you?

INSELL: [Dana Garrett](#) has really come on since the start of the season and has played the best basketball for us that she has played in the past two years. She is having to play at three different positions, at the two, three and four, at different times, and that



Head women's basketball coach Rick Insell gives his thoughts on this season and the upcoming Sun Belt Championships to GoBlueRaiders.com (Bradley Lambert)

is tough on anybody. She is a senior, she is strong, she has got a lot of basketball IQ. She can push a basketball off the board to the other end, and that is a dimension that we did not have earlier in the year.

[Tina Stewart](#) has helped us. She came in a couple of times when we were struggling and played well. She came in when Anne Marie was sick and scored in double figures twice. Both [Dymon Raynor](#) and [Icelyn Elie](#) have helped us at times. [Kortni Jones](#) has done a tremendous job at the point backing up Chelsia. I have played her more than any of the other backups because I can send her in to rest Chelsia when she needs a breather. I am very, very happy with our bench right now.

QUESTION: What will be the key to winning this tournament?

INSELL: It will start with conditioning, and our strength & conditioning program under Strength Coach Matt Riley. He has them in extremely great shape, and I am pretty confident about that area of the game.

We have got to knock down shots. If we can put together about eight more games where we can knock down shots, we can play with anybody.

And then we have to be able to rebound and stop the other team. Just about every team that we are going to play is going to be bigger and stronger, and a little more lateral quickness than us, and that is where our basketball IQ has to come in. We have got to use our heads and take care of business on that end of the floor, too, and if we can do that adequately, then we are going to be in just about every game all the way to the end.

COMMENT: Talk about the terrific fan base that this team has developed over the years.

INSELL: One of the things I wanted to do when I came in was to get the fans here to embrace our team, to get to know them as individuals, and to come watch the Lady Raiders play because they knew them. I wanted us to reach out not only to MTSU and Murfreesboro, but also to the surrounding communities: Shelbyville, Lebanon, Mt. Juliet, Woodbury, Manchester, Columbia. I wanted those people to start coming to our games and go back to their respective communities and tell folks, "Hey, you need to go see the Lady Raiders play."

I wanted our players to be accessible to our fans. We have had 200 kids in our dressing room after games to meet the team. I want those kids to grow up wanting to play for the Lady Raiders. And in doing that, you have to put an exciting brand of basketball out there, shooting the three, pressing and running the floor, and we have done that.

Our fan base has grown, but we still have some growing to do. I am not satisfied with that. I want to average 8,000 a game, and right now we are close to 5,000 per game, so we have a lot of work left.

QUESTION: In closing, would you like to make any other comments?

INSELL: We just appreciate everybody that is involved with Middle Tennessee State University, our faculty, our supporters, our administration, everybody. We have got what we need, and all of us need to grab on to that and push this thing on the next level.

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