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Q&A with head coach Kermit Davis

Blue Raiders preparing for SBC Championships

MT Athletic Communications

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - As the Blue Raiders prepare to open play at the Sun Belt Championships, goblueraiders.com sat down with head coach Kermit Davis to get a little insight on the 2009-10 season and the tournament.

Q: Talk about the team's momentum at this point.

KD: We've won 11 of our last 13, have the best road record in conference play (7-2), and have gained a lot of confidence. Confidence is where your team gains momentum. I like the mindset of where we are going, but I still think you keep momentum from the practice during the week. We have been real good so far, and I think that will be very important.

Q: What about the team leadership?

KD: We've had some guys emerge. [Montarrio Haddock](#) has made a lot of strides developing a leadership role and becoming a really good teammate. [Calvin O'Neil](#) has become a more vocal guy on the floor and in the huddle. [Desmond Yates](#) has always been a vocal guy. We have also gotten a lot of leadership from newcomers [James Washington](#) and [Trevor Ottley](#), who has come on lately. The best teams are the ones that have several good leaders, not just one.

Q: The tournament seedings are such that we could play Denver, then North Texas, and then either Western or Troy. It doesn't get much tougher than that.

KD: Denver is a totally different preparation than anyone else in our league because of the style they play. They play Florida International first, and FIU only lost by six at Denver, North Texas' only loss in the last five weeks of the season was to us. The whole tournament is going to be competitive as heck. Lafayette is talented as heck and Monroe only lost to North Texas by three. That's going to be a tough quarter-final game. Troy and Western split during the season. It's going to be a difficult three-day, or four-day run for any team.

Q: On the upside of possibly having to play Denver, North Texas and Western, we are 4-0 against those teams this year. On the down side, they are the three teams that have eliminated us from the tournament the last four years. Do the seniors, or do you, feel like we "owe" these teams?

KD: No, I don't think you owe anything, and I think those are totally different scenarios. We have lost players, as have all three of them, since we played those games. I think its all about who you are right now. I think all of those teams have changed, and have changed positive.

Q: This team seems to be more singularly focused than teams we have taken to the tournament in the past. Do you feel this way?

KD: Not really. Our team is 10-7 in Sun Belt Tournament play over the last seven years, which I believe is the second best record in the league (to Western Kentucky). We have always had a lot of success in the tournament. We haven't won it yet, which I don't know if you deem success by that. Last year, we won a first round game, then played North Texas, which was really good, then they lost to Western in a great game in the semis. The year before that, we went all the way to the championship game, and the year before that we beat Troy and South Alabama before losing to North Texas in a heart-breaker in the semi-finals.

Q: The way we are playing right now, the way we have come on at the end of the season, would you like to take this team back to Ohio, Marshall, NC A&T and UAB right now?

KD: No question. I'd like to have a healthy Boogie (Yates) playing. He missed all of those games. And you'd love to have Montarrio in the mind-set he is playing with now, and Calvin, and the improvement of our new guys, JW and Trevor. The maturity of our team is much different I've thought about that a lot, and there is no question that we'd be a tough out for all of those teams right now.

Q: What are your thoughts on the All-Conference team this year, both honors and omissions.

KD: There are a lot of good players, and I'd like to congratulate everyone that made it. I was really disappointed for [Montarrio Haddock](#) not to make the all-league team, and he's our leading rebounder and leading scorer. Calvin is playing as good as anybody and [James Washington](#) has had a good year,

For Calvin not to be the Defensive Player of the Year is disappointing. (Brett) Royster is a very good shot blocker. Florida Atlantic is



Head coach Kermit Davis and the Blue Raider men's basketball team are preparing for the Sun Belt Championships. Middle Tennessee will play in quarterfinals on Sunday, March 7 at 9 p.m. (Bradley Lambert)

maybe the best offensive team in our league, but they are among the worst defensive teams. We may be the best defensive team in the league. I guess most of the voters look at blocked shots and steals. [Calvin O'Neil](#) is a "shut down" type of defensive player. That is really disappointing.

Here we are with 13 wins, a share of the conference championship, and we only have one guy on the all-league team, and its [Desmond Yates](#), who by stats is the least productive he's been in three years. And I told our team that. I told them that every day you get up and try to prove people right or prove people wrong, and we've got opportunities in Hot Springs.

Q: What have been the most pleasant surprises on your team this year?

KD: The turnaround of [Montarrio Haddock](#), just his overall demeanor. He's not where he needs to be, but watching him mature as a teammate, we knew his talent level was good, watching him get himself in shape.

It was not a surprise, but just watching the leadership and the everyday things that [James Washington](#) has done for our team. Another has been watching what Calvin has done over the last six weeks, and all of the injuries and things that he has fought through. He has absolutely emerged as a consistent deal, and we need that in the tournament.

Q: What would a Sun Belt Conference tournament championship do for recruiting?

KD: Obviously, we have a regular season championship, which is really, really important. I think that tests your adversity and merit over 18 games, which is really, really a great accomplishment, something we haven't done since 1989.

To go to the NCAA Tournament, with all of the national recognition, would be great for the program. Obviously, it gives you a boost in recruiting, and gives you that name recognition all across the country. It helps your program, it helps your players, the coaches, it helps everybody. It's a business that we are all trying to win, to do good things. It helps Dr. McPhee, it helps Chris Massaro, it helps Alan Farley in fund-raising, it just helps everybody.

Middle Tennessee opens the 2010 Sun Belt Championships on Sunday, March 7 at 9 p.m. after receiving the No. 3 seed and a first round bye. The Blue Raiders will play the winner of Denver vs. FIU.

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