

September edition of Ask the AD

October 12, 2005 · MT Media Relations

I would like to thank all Middle Tennessee fans who have taken time to pass along suggestions or ask questions for the September installment of "Ask the AD". The response has been outstanding as always and I've taken time to read each and every e-mail we have received and given each careful consideration.

Because several questions refer to the same subject matter, I will answer many collectively, but I assure you all the responses are being heard and your willingness to take the time to write is greatly appreciated. We have received some questions regarding personnel issues in the past so please allow me to be clear that it is the policy of this administration to not entertain questions regarding personnel issues in a public forum. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.



Fan: Steven Simpson (Murfreesboro)

Question: What about taking the band, cheerleaders, football team, etc... for pep rally's to the students rather than hoping they come to a certain area on campus? The Quad and KUC Grill would be great places. Also, what about an incentive plan for the RA's on campus?

Massaro Response: We really appreciate your suggestion about moving pep rally's and various appearances to other locations on campus. This is something we have talked about and will take your suggestion into consideration. In fact, on October 5 and October 19 we will take the football helmet and setup on the Knoll at lunchtime to greet students, give them chances to win prizes, and simply let them be aware of when our next home game and show them our appreciation for their support.

The KUC is a thriving location and I have eaten there on numerous occasions just to be around our students and meet some of them one-on-one. I encourage all our coaches and administrators to have lunch there periodically and speak to our student body.

I like your idea about an incentive plan for the campus RA's and it is something we will look into for next year. In order to do it correctly we need time to plan and would not want to rush into anything at this juncture of the academic year. The biggest difficulty would be determining how many students each RA brought to the game. This will definitely be explored.

Fan: Beth Bolton (Brentwood)

Question: My daughter (Christina) is a sophomore at Middle Tennessee and she commented to me how the professors on campus never mention the upcoming football game or wear jersey's on Blue Friday. Christina watched the MT-North Texas game on TV and commented on how the campus took a different approach to football games compared to Tennessee. With the switch to Division I-A it may be necessary to look at the entire campus mindset regarding athletics in order to boost attendance.

Massaro Response: We are trying our best to get our faculty and staff to wear Blue prior to home games as part of our "Blue Friday" spirit campaign. Christina mentioned she watched the MT-North Texas game on television and I want to encourage her to attend the games because it truly adds to the student experience. The North Texas game we had a terrific, spirited student section. I hope Christina comes to a game and experiences it for herself. Our tailgating at Walnut Grove is second to none and I know she will have a terrific time.

Fan: Tim Layne (Murfreesboro)

Question: First of all, how did you like my field goal at the tailgate for the home opener? You sure stepped up and did well with your attempts. Anyway, how do you plan to keep the fans coming to games if they lose a couple more times like they did against North Texas?

Massaro Response: I do like the field goal setup at the tailgate function and I have to admit that I got lucky on a couple of attempts. I probably won't stay very long next time because you may challenge me to duplicate that feat and I am not sure I can do that again.

We are trying to sell the entire experience of coming to Blue Raider games and that all starts with tailgating and going all the way through the ballgame. We need to develop the mentality that these games are fun and worth attending. Sure, we want to win, but when we don't win we want it to be less disastrous. We want people to come to support our team and players under all circumstances. If we can develop the attitude that people are coming no matter what then we truly will be a strong Division I-A program.

Fan: Mike Ratcliff (Nashville)

Question: What's the deal with the rude ticket takers and ushers? The tickets I ordered got lost and Will Call could not locate them so they sent me through the 'comp' line. When I walked out the door the lady working thought I was trying steal something. Thanks for John Brooks handling the situation. Without his effort I would have demanded a refund. I was also appalled at the ushers making people behave like they were in a golf gallery and not a football game.

Massaro Response: This is a big deal with me and I appreciate people commenting on this whether they have a positive or negative experience. First of all, let me commend John Brooks on the job he does with our ticket office. John always has the customer's best interest at heart which presents us

in a positive light. I met with the ticket takers personally before the North Texas game and encouraged them to smile, say hello, and engage in personal conversation as they tore the customer's ticket and welcomed them to Floyd Stadium. I want this to happen so I welcome feedback on whether the ticket takers are following through with my request.

We did have some communication problems with our security and some policies that were enforced. Just because some things have been done a certain way in the past does not necessarily mean that is the way I want them handled so change has been slow. I am confident it will get better with each game. We want to have one of the friendliest stadiums around. Obviously, we have to have some control but at some point in time a common sense approach has to take over. Hopefully, we will find that median where people can come and have a great time and feel safe. We want to encourage our fans to yell as loud as they can for the Blue Raiders and provide our team with a true home field advantage.

Fan: Roger (Murfreesboro)

Question: It is a shame the scoreboard was not working at the first home game. If we can't get a new one can we at least fix the old one? I would also like to see a better selection of concessions on the upper level of the student side. Keep up the great work Mr. Massaro.

Massaro Response: Roger, thanks for your comments. Actually, the scoreboard was working perfectly Friday before the game. It was one of those things that happened to me at South Carolina as well. You test the board over and over then suddenly on gameday a circuit blows out unexpectedly and you lose the scoreboard for part of the game. Yes, this is embarrassing, especially since you only have five home games but it is one of those things that's hard to prevent. Keep your fingers crossed it does not happen again because there is a luck element involved and we will do your best to keep these problems to a minimum.

You also asked about improved concessions on the student side but I am unsure of what you mean. Please let me know in greater detail and I will try to answer your question. Thanks for participating this month.

Fan: Todd Savage (Murfreesboro)

Question: What are the people in the yellow event staff shirts doing harassing people about where they are sitting? At the North Texas game I kept seeing them tell people to not sit in a certain section where nobody was sitting.

Massaro Response: Please see the response above to Mike Ratcliff who had some of the same concerns. I will add that the blue seats in the middle on the West side are premium seats and require a donation. As a request from those ticket holders they want to protect their investment and not allow others to sit in that area without paying the additional charge. We are trying to make sure the blue seats keep their value and we appreciate your understanding with this matter.

Fan: Lana Preston (Murfreesboro)

Question: What is up with the new security presence at the football games? These people treat the fans like criminals. They are rude and obtrusive. They will make you leave immediately if you do not have a ticket for that seat even though no one was sitting there and the game was well underway. I have not experienced this myself, but I have witnessed it in my section (RR).

Massaro Response: It is true that RR is one of the blue sections I talked about in my previous response where people have paid extra money to sit in those seats. Many have asked us to control that area in order to protect their investment, and again, there is that delicate line we are trying to

walk. I think there are ways to approach this situation that would be a lot less threatening and friendlier. We are looking at this a lot more closely and I appreciate your feedback.

Fan: Chris (LaVergne)

Question: I just heard that Rutherford County has a professional basketball team coming called the Murfreesboro Musicians. Is Middle Tennessee supporting this team?

Massaro Response: We are happy to have fans from LaVergne coming to our games and supporting Blue Raider athletics. It is my understanding that the Musicians are coming to town but I do not know much about them except their games will be played in the spring. We wish them all the best. I want to remind you that season tickets for our men's and women's basketball teams are on sale now.

Fan: Sean (Rockwood)

Question: Is there any chance Middle Tennessee will get Pepsi at the games?

Massaro Response: Coca-Cola pays us a lot of money right now as a corporate sponsorship and pouring rights for the entire University. That contract has multiple years left on it so you will not see Pepsi at our games anytime soon. Typically, stadiums pour one product or the other and right now Middle Tennessee has Coca-Cola.

Fan: Justin Wax (Murfreesboro)

Question: Chris, you are doing a terrific job as AD. I just want to suggest giving away MT car flags as a Gameday promotion. Another idea is giving away a limited number of authentic MT tailgater aprons.

Massaro Response: First of all, we spend a lot of resources on our Gameday promotions and that is fine but I do want to shift resources from promotions more into selling. Our focus needs to move from the marketing a lot of giveaways to more group sells and making it a special event for the groups who are attending our events. You are looking at a heavy financial commitment to give out the flags. The difference between a \$3 product and a \$5 product is substantial when you are ordering in bulk of 5,000 or 10,000.

Fan: Don Fizer (Albers, Illinois)

Question: With the football season starting off on another low note is there a backup plan to quickly implement a means to win games and increase attendance?

Massaro Response: I know people were disappointed with the loss to North Texas in a game we totally dominated but turned it over five times and dropped a very big league game. The following week against Akron I thought we felt the effects of the North Texas loss, but I was very encouraged with the win over Vanderbilt. The enthusiasm of our fans was very obvious and I hope they respond by coming out in full force against Louisiana-Lafayette for Homecoming. We have a special going on now for that game where we have \$5 tickets up until Gameday when the price jumps to \$10. A family of four can come to our game on October 22 for only \$20 and watch Division 1-A college football and have a great experience. Hopefully, this will entice more people to attend our Homecoming game and show support for our football program.

Fan: Mike (Murfreesboro)

Question: First of all, let me say what a great job you are doing and I am very excited about our future football schedules. What about starting the season off with a UTC or a Tennessee Tech? Also, I have been to every home game the past five years and a new video scoreboard that would show replays would be HUGE.

Massaro Response: Playing a team like UTC or Tennessee Tech might be a good idea early in the season because I am a firm believer that schools in Tennessee should play other Tennessee teams.

I would echo your comments on the replay board because I have been spoiled over the last few years at South Carolina and they are very important to the total fan experience. The first two home games this year I was guilty by looking at the board for replays out of habit. Getting a new video board is a priority because it only enhances our patrons experience at Floyd Stadium and that is very important to us.

Fan: Mark Leonard (Murfreesboro)

Question: I think if you want to put more fans in the stands then you need to recruit more local talent.

Massaro Response: For one, I am not a recruiting expert. That is why we have coaches and pay them a salary. They are the professionals and get paid to judge talent and make decisions on who we recruit and where we recruit. Every school in every part of the country can point to local kids who they missed on. People miss on recruiting every year. It is not an exact science. That being said, we are blessed with good football in the middle Tennessee area and are fortunate to have some of the top teams in the state right here in our own backyard. I am a firm believer of recruiting your backyard first, then going out. If it becomes a choice between better players, I think the bottom line is that fans want us to win and that is why we pay coaches to do those evaluations.

Fan: Bill Pinson (Franklin)

Question: Thank you for dropping by the tailgating area on Saturday (Akron). I have been attending games since 2001 when my daughter was a member of the Band of Blue. I appreciate you explaining why we are paying for spaces in Greenland Drive to park our tents because now it makes sense. I have an idea for this. Why not sell a tailgating flag for \$5 per game. This may give the fans pride and ownership for their area.

Massaro Response: First off, I would be remised if I did not talk about our Band of Blue. Those kids work so hard and I am so thrilled to be a part of such a top-notch group. I can't tell you what it means to our athletic department to have such a great band like the Band of Blue. It has been a joy watching them peform in my first year.

I enjoy coming out to the tailgating areas and talking with our fans. Charging \$5 per space for a tent is a catch-22, but I felt it was the fairest thing to do. There is the argument that you don't want to chase away supporters by nickel and diming them to death, but I also don't want our folks being hassled once they already have their tailgating tents up and in place. I think this is a good policy and I do like the idea of a flag or a season parking pass one can purchase at the beginning of the year. This is something we will consider for next year.

Fan: TJ Friedlin (Jacksonville, Florida)

Question: After attending the first two home games, I have noticed that alcohol is allowed in the stadium for the open air box seats and I have had to put up with fans that drink too much. As a parent of a player I find this behavior upsetting. Is there a reason why we allow alcohol in the stadium?

Massaro Response: Yes, alcohol is allowed in our open air boxes and in the suites in the tower. We ask that people drink responsibly and show control and we hope that they do. It is never pleasant when somebody over-indulges and causes disruption because it takes away from the overall game experience. However, this can happen from fans in other areas of the stadium who have had too

much at their tailgate or somehow sneaking alcohol into the stadium. These problems exist across the stadium and it is my experience that these problems occur most often at night games because people have had more time to over-indulge. I want to ask everyone to come to our games and have fun, but be aware of the people around you so that everyone's gameday experience will be great.

Fan: Carl Hoffman (Nashville)

Question: Is there a site on the web where I can purchase Middle Tennessee shirts, hats, etc...

Massaro Response: Yes. Go to our official athletic website at GoBlueRaiders.com and click on the link titled Lightning's Locker Room. It is located on the left-hand side of the front page.

Fan: Tom Ace (Murfreesboro)

Question: What are the chances of us having Blue Field Turf?

Massaro Response: I am not in favor of Blue Field Turf. I am a green grass guy. I think we can do better than having that type of gimmicky marketing. I want a green, synthetic surface.

Fan: Matt (Starkville, Mississippi)

Question: Why does the athletic department not accept credit cards other than Visa or Master Card?

Massaro Response: It is not just the athletic department. The University as a whole does not accept credit cards other than Visa or Master Card. The Discover and American Express cards have much higher interest rates back to the customer than Visa or Master Card so that is why the University does not accept those cards. It is something we will look at with our business and financial department.

Fan: Anthony House (Kingland, Georgia)

Question: Are there plans being made to upgrade the football facility?

Massaro Response: As I have said many times, we need a new synthetic surface on our playing field and we need a video board in Floyd Stadium and those are two things we are working on now. In the long range, we would like to have a new football office complex.

Fan: Phil White (Brentwood)

Question: I know that winning is the utmost way to put people in the stands and I look at other high profile programs and see how many young men are in trouble with the law like UT, and players getting shot, like at Vanderbilt, and it makes me think about our football team. To my knowledge no one is in trouble with the law or has been for a few years. I believe this is a tribute to the type of young men Andy McCollum is recruiting.

Massaro Response: We are very proud of all our student-athletes for staying out of trouble and acting responsibly. Since I took over as athletic director on May 2 there have been very few problems and I am very happy about that aspect. I am very proud that our student-athletes graduate at a higher rate than the student body.

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