Quotes from Tuesday's Sun Belt Basketball Media Days

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE MEN'S COACH
KERMIT DAVIS
How excited are you and Murfreesboro to be hosting this year's Sun Belt Tournament, March 2-7.

"It's the largest on-campus college basketball tournament in the country - 22 teams, men's and women's - and our people have done such a great job through the years hosting all of the TSSAA Boys and Girls State Tournaments so Murfreesboro is well-equipped. It's been great to see the renovations to our arena, and I think it's not only great for our league, but it's great for our community and the middle Tennessee area to have 14 games nationally televised on the ESPN family network."

How do you balance the demands of such a tough schedule and your youngest team at Middle Tennessee?

"It's going to challenge our team. We have seven freshmen. We go to Louisville, to Memphis, we play Utah State twice, nine of our first 13 games are away from home, so with a young team it's going to be difficult. We do have one goal for this season and that's to be undefeated at home in March. Hopefully that will lead us to playing really well at the end of February, start of March."

Attendance has increased 68 percent in your first three years. Why do you think that's happened?

"It's a good basketball community. It was dormant for a long time. When we got here four years ago there was a feeling of apathy. People didn't care if you won or lost. Two years ago we broke the single-game attendance record with 11,807 against Western Kentucky and things have taken off. We are not there yet, our season-ticket base is growing. We have a goal of 3,500 season tickets sold this year and I think we will do that. It's been fun. I think they appreciate hard play and high energy. I think we have tried to work in the community as far as staff and players as hard as anyone in the country and hopefully it's paying off."

What are some of the keys to the season?

"The thing I have to do as a head coach, and it's not one of my better virtues, is be patient. I have to

understand we are not going to be as far along as I would like. We could be playing well against this tough schedule early and it may not amount to wins, so patience, yet still being demanding is a key. We have to have our returning guys, Fats Cuyler, Marcus Morrison and Kyle Young, play well early. It's going to be fun to watch our young guys grow. I think our best basketball is going to be middle of January when Sun Belt play starts, February, and then when Sun Belt play starts."

MIDDLE TENNESSEE WOMEN'S COACH
RICK INSELL

OPENING REMARKS:
"Everything is new and everything is different. On the positive side everything is exciting. Being here is like living a dream. What I am doing now is teaching and coaching basketball from 7 a.m. in the morning until 10 p.m. at night. I love doing this. I have been very fortunate that Middle Tennessee has given me the opportunity to coach their women's basketball team. "I have met most of the coaches at some point or another through my dealings with them as a high school coach or in travel ball. This league is tough. Out of the 32 conferences in the country, the Sun Belt is ranked in the top 12 or 13."

STYLE OF PLAY

"We are going to pressure the ball. I don't want any team to run their offense with just token pressure on the ball. We want to make them earn everything sideline to sideline. We're not going to do as much of that as we would like because of our numbers. When we start the season at Chattanooga we will have nine players dressing and at the semester break hopefully we will have 10 or 11."

ON TOP RETURNERS TIA STOVALL, CHRISSY GIVENS AND KRYSTLE HORTON

"Tia Stovall made Sun Belt Preseason First Team All-Conference and that is big for us. She is the type of player you enjoy coaching. Every day she is giving everything she has. "And then you have Chrissy Givens. I have had a lot of great players in my coaching career but Chrissy Givens may be the hardest working player I have ever been around. She goes 100 percent from the start of practice until the end. "Krystle Horton is a real joy to coach. She is such a hard worker in the classroom, in the community and on the basketball court. "It makes life a lot more entertaining for us as coaches to know we have three players like Tia, Chrissy and Krystle player for us."

REPLACING PATRICE HOLMES
"I don't think you can replace a player like Patrice Holmes. I sure would like to have a whole team just like her, though. We have two or three players who we hope will step up and make the big play, or hit the big show like Patrice did down the stretch last year. We have players on our team who saw what Patrice did for the team and I am hoping they will step into that role."

SUN BELT COMMISSIONER WRIGHT WATERS:
"It's a simple formula for our conference to advance and be successful. There are three things. No. 1 - win games, especially nonconference games. It's important for respect for our league and it's also about the public's perception. We're in a world where many times perception becomes reality, and winning these nonconference games shows where we fit. It's about respectability and recruiting.

No. 2 - we have to put people in the stands. Universities are spending a lot of money on the athletic enterprise, and we justify our existence by putting people in the stands. Everything we do is a

recruiting function, and we have to sell season tickets to better our possibilities of television and media coverage and sponsorship opportunities.

No. 3 - we do it with class. It's not necessarily about spending more money, but being squeaky clean with compliance and also student welfare. It's much better to recruit a quality person the first time and keep that person for four years. Right now we have to right group of coaches with the right morals in place, taking care of kids. That's one of the big reasons why the APR for our conference schools has gone up in basketball.

We will once again break records for the number of games on television. We will keep an eye on the national level with ESPN and ESPN2, and we have our football in the door and will monitor ESPNU. We will continue the development of our regional network, which currently reaches 21 million homes. And we will encourage schools to work on a local network, because every game is an infomercial for the school, to publicize upcoming events and showcase the product.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS MEN'S COACH
MONTE TOWE
On the situation facing the UNO men's basketball team in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina:
"They say that out of something bad comes something good. Well I can't tell you how much good has come out of this hurricane, all of the many people helping our kids and our program. Guys I coached at Florida, in the NBA, and other coaches like Kermit Davis and their kids out there raising money. Everyone has been so kind and helpful.

"Our kids had nothing when they left their apartments. We've done this several times since I've been at New Orleans, leave and come back. And everyone thought they'd be coming back this time. They left their apartments in slippers and with a bag of clothes. Our kids have not been back to their apartments since then, so we need that help. Words can't describe how much it has meant to our program. If I said Thank You to everyone who has helped, I wouldn't be able to say it enough times in the rest of my life.

SUN BELT CONFERENCE ALL-TIME COACH
GENE BARTOW (UAB)

On being named the Sun Belt's All-Time Coach in conjunction with 30th anniversary celebration.
"The Sun Belt Conference now, 10 years ago and 20 years ago, has always been a great athletic conference and basketball has been a prominent sport. In the days when I was coaching in it we had a lot of great players. Today they still have a lot of great players. It's a great league and Commissioner Waters is doing a great job. I am appreciative they are honoring me. I just think what is going on in Murfreesboro here today is great for college basketball."

What will be your message to the coaches?
"This is a wonderful profession that you are in as a head basketball coach. You have an opportunity as a head basketball coach to be a role model to help young people. Certainly, you need to win games if you are going to keep doing it, but it's a great occupation and it's a wonderful way to make a living. I hope they know how fortunate they are. I spent 34 years as a head basketball coach at the college level and I can't say I enjoyed every day, but I enjoyed most of them."

The Sun Belt would love to have multiple teams in the NCAA Tournament. Is that really the measuring stick of where the conference is?

"I'm not sure it's a measuring stick whether you get two teams or more in or whatever, but obviously the Sun Belt, in my opinion, should get two or three teams in year-in, year-out. Back in the golden years as I would call them, in the 80s, we were getting two, sometimes three, and one year we got four into the Tournament. Times have changed. It's a different era, a lot of conference realignment so you just have to play the games and hope two or more make the NCAA Tournament. The NIT restructuring you would think would help. I would think there would be a day, hopefully this year, that the Sun Belt would get at least two in the NCAA and maybe two or three in the NIT."

Kermit Davis has nine new players on his roster. Did you ever have a team like that where the roster was almost all new?

"I think the only time was my first year or two at UAB when we were starting a program from scratch. He will have a challenge. He will have nights he doesn't sleep real well. He will have games where he looks at the stats and say, "How could we possibly have 25 turnovers?" That's the main thing."

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