January edition of "Ask the AD"

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I would like to thank all Middle Tennessee fans who have taken time to pass along suggestions or ask questions for the January 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:** Charlie (Shelbyville)

Question: I am wondering when the fans will be able to purchase Blue Raider merchandise at the basketball games. I am sure Lightning's Locker Room does a good a job with sales, but I am sure sales would be increased if there was even a small booth inside the Murphy Center selling Blue Raider merchandise. I know Lightning's Locker Room may not be under the athletic department, but I'm sure there is a good opportunity for vendors and MT athletics to raise revenues here. What is your plan in this respect? Will Sun Belt Tournament commemorative merchandise be available for sell at the Murphy Center when the time comes?

Massaro Response: You are correct that Lightning's Locker Room is not under the athletic department's purview. Lightning's Locker Room is only staffed during conference basketball games and this is something we would like to change in the future. In the past they have opened up one half hour prior to tipoff but we have convinced them in order to be a first class operation we needed them to open when the doors open to the arena. To their credit Lightning's Locker Room is now opening when the doors open for a basketball game. Lightning's Locker Room is located in the southwest corner of the Murphy Center. **Fan:** Daniel Keele (Wartrace)

Question: How much will the TSSAA's impending move to Murfreesboro benefit the Athletic Department in terms of exposure to the state? Will Middle Tennessee serve as the complex for Fall/Spring Sport Championships in the near future?

Massaro Response: We are always excited to host TSSAA events and I think it is great that we bring so many high school students to our campus. It helps the athletic department and the

University as a whole in attracting perspective college bound students. The BRAA serves our athletic department well because it involves every high school student in the state and is the place where most can see their dream of a championship come true. **Fan:** Matt (Murfreesboro)
Question: Is there something that the everyday Blue Raider fan can do to help bring attention to our events? I'm a student and nothing makes me prouder than this university and I want to know what my friends and I can do to help bring awareness of Blue Raider sports in our community.
Massaro Response: Yes. I would encourage our fans to contact our media and tell them that they want increased coverage in their perspective outlets. The Daily News Journal does a great job here in town of covering the Blue Raiders. Obviously, we would like to get more coverage out of The Tennessean and the Nashville radio and television outlets. If our fans voice that concern I believe it would help us gain more exposure. We are working everyday to increase our exposure in those areas because I think that in the long term growth of our program that is extremely important. **Fan:** James Burch (Valena, GA)
Question: How is the football schedule set? Is the schedule put together by you or by the Middle Tennessee coaching staff in general?
Massaro Response: Generally, as the athletic director, I put the schedule together but also consult the president and head football coach. It has been an interesting experience since I arrived at Middle Tennessee because we have had television affect our scheduling a great deal. **Fan:** Earl Wilson (La Vergne)
Question: Coach Massaro, I know the big Orange beast to the east is hard to negotiate with but why do we not have the Volunteers on our baseball or basketball schedules? Both would be naturals for a home and home with the closeness and low costs to both schools?
Massaro Response: We would love to have a home-and-home contest with Tennessee in basketball and baseball. We would sign that contract very quickly. **Fan:** Porter Nelms (Murfreesboro)

Question: While I hate that Vanderbilt will not be the football season opener in 2006, I understand the reasons for negotiating the change. If future home games against them are now possible, the end result will turn out better. However, in an effort to get Vandy and Michigan to agree to this "made for TV" game, did the network ever propose televising a MT vs Ball State game? Both schools now have the same open date, and both were inconvenienced by the network's actions. It seems a televised game against a MAC school on a national network would ease the problem of scrambling for a new opponent. I would hope that something like this came up during the discussions. If not it should have been!
Massaro Response: Television did not propose carrying the Middle Tennessee-Ball State game. In fact, when I knew the Vanderbilt game was not going to happen my first phone call was to Ball State. Ball State and Michigan were still able to work out a playing date because both had an opening later in the season. It would have been great to play Ball State in Murfreesboro and maybe begin a series with them, but it did not work out. **Fan:** Daniel Keele (Wartrace)
Question: I know you have discussed the cost to replace the field surface in Floyd Stadium. What ideas have you had on the possibility of public/private fundraising? And has Middle Tennessee considered using funds or grants from the County or City to help pay for the surface?
Massaro Response: I think it is time for our fans and users to pay for most of the field turf. We are in the midst of a private fundraising campaign right now and we hope it is successful and that we can pay for all of it through donations. That is our goal. **Fan:** Roger Vandergriff (Soddy Daisy)
Question: Being a '78 graduate and former wrestler at MTSU, has there been any thought of bringing wrestling back to our school? Tennessee and other surrounding states have great high school wrestling and I know it would be supported. Our coach at MTSU was Gordon Connell. He is

still going strong teaching and coaching wrestling at the McCallie School in Chattanooga. Last count, he has won 11 state titles. Several members of our team became educators and wrestling coaches. That list would include myself, Steve Henery, David Scott, Frank and Pat Simpson, and Steve Patterson. With all the growth and development with MTSU athletics, why not bring back wrestling? What do you think?
Massaro Response: I do not see wrestling being a sport we would add at Middle Tennessee. In the near future, the next sport we add will be a women's sport. **Fan:** Roger (Murfreesboro)
Question: As part of the revamping of Murphy Center will the ceiling be cleaned and can the Concrete Industry class do something about the stairs outside of the facility? I was also wondering if we should turn control of the blimp over to the Aerospace department?
Massaro Response: Roger, I have also noticed the ceiling and believe it would dramatically improve our appearance if we could upgrade that area. As for the blimp, we actually have a student from the aerospace program that flies the blimp at all our basketball games. **Fan:** Carrie Groce (Murfreesboro)
Question: I hear we are going to start a fundraiser for the new baseball stadium, what do you think about selling bricks as part of the fundraiser? As an incentive the buyer's name could be engraved to each brick. You could charge $1,000 per brick. I also wanted to thank you for the great progress you have made in your new position in such a small amount of time. You're a wonderful asset to the university.
Massaro Response: Carrie, we are excited about our new baseball stadium and feel it will be a terrific addition to our campus and be a signature piece to our University. There will be a fundraising opportunity for everyone and eventually we will have bricks in the concourse, but at this point in time our concentration is on capital gifts which are gifts of $10,000 or more and can be spread out over a period of three or four years. There are also opportunities for personal seat licenses. There are mechanisms for every budget to help us raise the money to build a new stadium. It will be great for our University, community, and region as the economic impact of a new stadium will benefit all involved. **Fan:** Daniel Keele (Murfreesboro)
Question: With the Thursday night game vs Tennessee Tech in football the traditional battle for the Totum Pole or Shinny Ninny will once again be up for grabs. I was wondering how you will market the tradition to gameday fans and to our new fast growing fan base that may not be aware of the rich traditional and regional rivalry between Middle Tennessee and TTU.
Massaro Response: Basically to this point we have just talked in broad terms in what our marketing approach will be for the Tennessee Tech game. Our focus right now is to finish out the basketball season strong and do a good job with ticket sales for the conference basketball tournament. After that we will concentrate on the upcoming football season. **Fan:** Chad Wood (Nashville)
Question: It's exciting to hear the news of the long overdue development of a new baseball stadium. Can you provide us with any of the details about enhancements or upgrades that will be made to the plans that were put together a number of years ago?
Massaro Response: We will have a new grandstand, pressbox, enlarged dugouts, improved restrooms and concession stands, a plaza area, and many more fan amenities. The stadium will be a cornerstone for our athletic department and showpiece for our University. **Fan:** Wayne Fox (Franklin)
Question: I am a BRAA member and try to support the athletic program as much as I can on a retired educator's pension. I purchase season tickets each year for football; attend all of the home games and usually one or two of the road games. Because of the larger number of basketball games and being unable to attend each one, there is just not enough incentive on the cost to justify purchasing season tickets. I have attended about 6 men's home games and one women's game. I

would purchase the season tickets for both men's and women's basketball if a greater reduction is implemented over the cost of individual game tickets.
Massaro Response: We are looking at our pricing for the coming season. One thing we are examining is to develop a better package for fans that buy both season tickets. Your point is well taken and I hope you will continue purchasing tickets for both sports. **Fan:** DJ Denning (Hermitage)
Question: My question has to do with our APR and the reduction of scholarships. If possible, can you explain why we were hit so severe? I have not heard or been able to find anything about other schools being penalized. I know that you will get us back on track but with the negative press recently concerning this it would be nice to know how bad other teams in our area APRs were and how many scholarships they lost.
Massaro Response: We were just one of the first schools to release our scores because we wanted to get it out to the public and begin developing our plan for improvement. Everyone should know how important academics are in the success of athletic programs throughout the country. I am confident the changes and plans we have made and the things Dr. McPhee has done will put us in excellent shape in terms of the APR. You will read more about other schools' situations in March. I do not believe we are alone. **Fan:** Clay (Brentwood)
Question: How do you go about reserving tickets for the upcoming Sun Belt Conference basketball tournament?
Massaro Response: It's going to be a great event Clay and I am glad you asked about tickets. We will be hosting 20 tournament games in the midst of March Madness and you can purchase a ticket for just $80. Please call our ticket office at 1-888-YES-MTSU or order online at GoBlueRaiders.com. This event is a significant event for our community and we hope everyone supports it fully.

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