Ottley and rest of Blue Raiders preparing for UAB

Mark Ottley returns as fan fixture;Tipoff set for 7 p.m. Wednesday

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Mid-November means two things at Middle Tennessee. The new basketball season gets underway with all of the excitement and promise of a great year ahead. And Mark Ottley starts racking up frequent flier miles.

Coach Kermit Davis' team has flexed some muscle, and showed speed and athleticism that has fans anticipating great things. A 90-46 season-opening win over Tennessee Temple only whetted their appetite to see the Blue Raiders go against one of the annual powers in Division I. They will get that chance as the UAB Blazers come to town Wednesday night to do battle. Tipoff is scheduled for 7 pm, and it will be Chamber of Commerce Night at Murphy Center.

Middle Tennessee lost by one point in Birmingham last December in what was one of the best games the Blue Raiders played all year. UAB then went on to beat Butler the next week, and Butler didn't lose again until they fell to Duke in the national championship game. UAB finished the season 25-9.

A large crowd is expected for the game, and one very familiar face will be in the crowd...again. Mark Ottley is the father of starting forward Trevor Ottley, and despite having to come some 1,400 miles

from his home in Hays, Kan., Mark Ottley will make the trip to see nearly all of Trevor's games in his senior year.

"It's a solid four hour drive to Kansas City, and then I hop on a plane to Nashville." said the senior Ottley. "We were here for the Tennessee Temple game, and will be back on Wednesday for the UAB game, then go on down to Auburn for the tournament this weekend. Then we'll come back for the Evansville game on the 24th."

Mark had seen every game that Trevor has played in until last year. That includes grade school, middle school, high school and junior college. He saw over half of the games last year, most of them here.

Davis noted that "there are a lot of great parents that follow their sons to a lot of Middle Tennessee's games, both home and away, but Mark Ottley is amazing. He is very close with Trevor, and we knew right from the beginning we were going to have to sell Mark very, very hard to get his son to leave Kansas. That was a hard thing for Mark to do, but I think it has been great for Trevor. Mark is a great father, and he's close to a lot of guys on our team, and I know it's great for Trevor to see him at those games."

Mark agrees. "When Trevor signed with Middle Tennessee, I told Coach Davis that I would love to see him closer to home, but the most important thing was that he play somewhere where he could be an impact to the team, and be an asset, and Kermit said all of the right things and here we are in Tennessee."

"Would I have liked to see him at Wichita State? Absolutely. That's only a two and a half hour drive from Hays, and that would be wonderful. But we are here, and we support the Blue Raiders."

When Trevor went out for basketball as a high school freshman, he was 5-10 and weighed 105 pounds. His coach tried to discourage him from even trying, but he hung in there and made the team.

"He sat on the end of the bench for two years, and we went and supported him every game. He became a 6-7 junior, and was a full impact player when they won the 4A state championship his senior year.

"It was kind of a story-book tale that you dreamed about, and it came true." said Mark. "I don't regret a single mile that I went to follow him. It was 100% worth it. This is something that I will be able to tell my grand-kids."

Post-game critiques are usually reserved for the coaching staff, but Trevor gets another earful from his Dad after every game.

"When you lose, and you're tired, and your coach just got done chewing you out, then you are thanking God that you made it out of there. Then you get to the parking lot, and that is when you get the worst of it. He doesn't hold anything back," the younger Ottley said.

Mark just grins and replies, "I don't carry my own clip-board, but I sure do voice my opinion of what I think he did right or wrong. I do compliment once in a while. I don't make it all bad."

Whenever Mark is not able to make the trip to wherever the Blue Raiders are playing, he is usually able to get the game on TV or computer, and that is an excuse for a party in Hays.

"We have food, big screen TV's. If we are running short of time to prepare, one of our businesses in Hays is an auto auction, and we set up there, and all of the staff and employees come and bring stuff in. We just have a great time watching Trevor play on TV."

Davis is well aware of the TV parties in Hays. "They really have it set up out there in Kansas. They have a huge family that is real close, and lots of friends, and they love to watch Trevor play. They get a big kick out of watching and listening to Chip (Walters) and those guys doing the broadcasts on the internet."

"It's big time back there in Kansas," declares Mark. "Trevor sent us some posters, and we put them up. The local newspaper runs stats on his game, and how the team is doing. We've put Middle Tennessee on the map back home."

Mark Ottley is proud of his son, and the whole team, and the effort that Trevor has put forth to be as asset to them. "It is fun to watch, and the camaraderie with some of his teammates that we have gotten to know, it's just so much fun.

The Ottley's will have Thanksgiving in Murfreesboro after the Evansville game on Wednesday, Nov. 24. "We've invited some of the boys to have Thanksgiving Dinner with us here, the ones that have no place to go. We have a place rented that we are going to have dinner. It'll be a lot of fun. I'm proud of all of them!"

What is Mark Ottley's initial impression of the 2010-2011 Blue Raiders?

"The depth on this team is impressive, and we looked good against Tennessee Temple, but I think we will have a better idea of how good we are going to be after we play UAB.

"Trevor's teams won a state championship in high school, then won the Kansas junior college title at Garden City, and finished 6th in the national juco tournament. Last year, we won part of the Sun Belt Conference for the first time. All we need now is to get to the NCAA Tournament to validate this program."

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