

Inside the Huddle: MT women's basketball camp report

Q&A with Insell; three players featured

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Each Monday that has led up to the start of the season, GoBlueRaiders.com has had exclusive inside access to the Middle Tennessee women's basketball program. Each week a short Q&A was included with a member of the coaching staff, along a few questions with selected players.



Week Four Spotlight: Head Coach Rick Insell

Rick Insell, as head man of the Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders' basketball program for the past half-dozen years, has taken an already good program and raised it to even greater heights. In his half-dozen seasons at the helm, Middle Tennessee has been to the NCAA Tournament five times and to the postseason WNIT once. He has raised awareness of the program, both locally and nationally, and has increased attendance dramatically in his six-year reign. The two largest crowds have been No. 5 Tennessee (11,802) and No. 1 Maryland (10,010).

Individually, Insell's teams featured the nation's leading scorer three years in a row (2008, 2009 and 2010), and he has recruited and coached five 1,000-point scorers at Middle Tennessee. His teams have a record of 148-47 overall (.759) and Sun Belt Conference mark of 104-14. MT is 50-1 at home versus SBC competition.

A nationally-honored coach at the high school level before coming to Middle Tennessee, Insell's Shelbyville Central teams won 10 Tennessee state championships and two national titles. He was twice named National High School Coach of the Year. Insell is a 1977 graduate of Middle Tennessee.

The following is an interview with Insell:

Q. What has been the most difficult part of coaching this young team?

We are allowing our players to open their games up a little bit and I am having to become more patient because I am not used to us throwing the ball all over the gym. My coaches tell me that I will have to learn to live with that, and I will, for a while.

Q. On losing Anne Marie Lanning to graduation

I don't think you ever replace an Anne Marie Lanning. She was absolutely awesome the four years she was here. This year, our leadership is going to have to come by committee. We have many voices on this team that can lead in several different directions, and that is what we are asking them to do. Ebony Rowe would be a great choice. I also think KeKe Stewart, Icelyn Elie and Kortni Jones can as well.

Q. On Freshman All-American Ebony Rowe

Ebony is going to have to step up her game this year because she has a target on her back now. Ice, Kortni and KeKe will have to step up as well. Ebony can do some things that you can't coach. She is blessed with that talent. She knows how to go get the basketball and finish underneath, and she knows how to set a teammate up. We are working with her to face up to the basket and drive for the goal, or take a 15-foot jump shot, or shoot the '3'. I think you have to take the ball into the paint in basketball games. We have been very fortunate in the past to have Alysha Clark and others who could do that. Now we have Ebony who can do that. I also want to emphasize that we have other great players around her and any one of them could develop into a star.

Q. On playing tough competition outside of the Sun Belt

That has always been a part of my philosophy. I feel that this helps our team at the end of the year, whether it was high school or college. When I was hired here, I felt like the community had not yet bought into the program here like it should. I felt like we should go out and play some of the top teams in the country, such as Maryland, Georgia and Tennessee. It also helps our conference. The RPI of our conference, and the teams in our conference, benefit by playing those types of teams.

Q. On being picked to win the Eastern Division of the Sun Belt Conference

It is good to be recognized, but this is my seventh year here. You never know which teams, or which players, are going to step up. With Karen Aston as the new coach at North Texas, you are going to see a better program there. You have Erik Johnson at Denver and Errol Rogers at Louisiana. You cannot look at any team and say that game will be a definite win. I feel like we have some of the best women's basketball coaches here in the Sun Belt. It is a lot tougher for me to win inside the Sun Belt than outside. Some of these teams outside the Sun Belt are just getting by on talent. While we have some talented players in this league, there are also some great coaches.

Q. On three-point shooting this season

We are working with Ebony on her 3-point shooting and she's capable hitting two or three a game now. Jamila Ajanaku is blessed. We've moved Icelyn Elie outside and she's shown us that she can consistently shoot the three. KeKe has tremendous touch from the outside, and we are going to turn Kortni Jones loose a little more this year. There have been times in practice when you didn't know that you didn't have a Brandi Brown or a Jackie Pickel or an Anne Marie Lanning. We've got the people in the system, it's just that we have to get into the schedule and into some pressure situations. I'll be honest with you. There are going to be some times when we are going to look terrible, but there are going to be some times when we look pretty good. What we have to do is take the times we look pretty good, and build on that, and we have to get them playing with that type of consistency toward the end of the year. If so, then we are again going to have a very good basketball team.

Q. Teams vs. Programs

On both the high school and college levels, you have teams and you have programs. A team is there for one, maybe two, years with a special group of kids, then you don't hear about them anymore. A

program is there every year. If you look at what has gone on here at Middle Tennessee since Larry Joe Inman, through Lewis Bivens and Stephany Smith, and now myself, we've got a program. Middle Tennessee has been to the NCAA 14 times, and to the WNIT several times. We have a program, and one of our goals at the start of every year is postseason play, the NCAA in particular. Nothing is going to change on that. And those young ladies that are getting up at 5:30 in the morning and practicing, as well as going thru all of the pressure they have to go through to be a college athlete, they understand that with a Division I program like Middle Tennessee, there is pressure to come in and take this program to the next level.

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR THE LADY RAIDERS:

This week we will feature Molly McFadden, Shanice Cason and Ebony Rowe.

MOLLY MCFADDEN

How would your classroom professors describe you?

I'm always the one speaking up and answering questions. I always make a point to go introduce myself to my professors. I want to put forth my effort in the classroom, just like I do on the basketball court. I feel like the better relationship you can have with your professors, the better off you are going to be. The more interaction you have with them, the more you show them you are interested.

What two games on the schedule do you most look forward to?

I definitely look forward to Tennessee. I remember we played them my freshman year up there. I guess every high school player in the state growing up wants to either play for UT or against them. It was a great experience. The other one would have to be South Dakota State. My sophomore year, we went up there and they beat us. I'm looking forward to having them here, and beating them like they beat us.

If you had a free weekend, and enough money, where would you go?

Las Vegas. I do like Las Vegas.

How does it feel to have big crowds at home games and a big following on the road?

Obviously, the fan base has accepted me.

SHANICE CASON

Why did you choose Middle Tennessee to continue your basketball career?

One because of the coaching staff. They were open-hearted. They would call you and just ask how you were doing, nothing about basketball, but about your family, your schooling, how everything was going. And MT is right here in town. That is important to me because my family and I are really close. It was important to my family because they would get to see all of my games. They never miss a game. Coach Insell is a wonderful coach, so that was another reason to stay. When they told me they were looking at me, I thought, "Okay, I'm hopping on the bandwagon at Middle Tennessee."

What is your favorite place to eat locally?

I like Olive Garden, the whole menu. And I love their bread. I could eat as much bread as possible and still want my food when it comes.

What do you normally do before a basketball game to get focused or fired up?

I'll get up and then I pray, then I go shoot a little bit. Then I'll come back and rest, just clear my

mind of all my negatives, focus on what my task is in the game, and what I know I have to do to help my team win. I listen to music, and then right before a game, I'll pray again.

What part of the college game has been the biggest adjustment for you coming out of high school?

Being in high school, you are pretty much the same as everybody else. They might be a little taller than you, but you still may be able to go up and battle them. Now that I'm in college, I can't go up against the big girls like I'm used to doing. I have to develop more of a point shot and be more oriented on the perimeter. Passing the ball on the floor instead of passing it in the air. In high school, you could do that because the players are not as athletic.

If you could have a famous athlete follow you on Twitter, who would it be?

Tamika Catchings, who used to play at UT.

EBONY ROWE

What one thing, off the court, can you do better than most?

I'm awesome at making up dances to different songs, with Janay Brinkley, and recording them. We've done that three times and are thinking about starting a dancing group.

What is the toughest place to play in the Sun Belt Conference?

I would have to say Western Kentucky because when you walk in, you feel the competitiveness between the two teams. It's a rivalry, to say the least.

What part of your game has improved the most since you came to Middle Tennessee?

I would say my decision-making skills. In high school, I just relied on my pure athleticism to get the ball in the hole. Here, Coach Insell has made me think about what is the best option, where I need to look, what moves I need to make to get open.

What is your favorite place to eat locally?

It would have to be Olive Garden. I always go about once a week, always with one or more of my teammates. I love the Chicken Parmesan.

Why did you choose Middle Tennessee to continue your basketball career?

I was looking for a school that would push me, not just in basketball, but academically as well. That was really important to me, and they have a really good physics program here. I am majoring in physics with a minor in engineering. And then, when I met with Coach Insell, he really believes that we can make it to the Final Four, and he was the first coach that had said that to me, and I really wanted to be a part of it. When he believed, it made me believe.

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