

Basketball teams discuss upcoming Sun Belt tournament at press conference

Men's and women's teams are both No. 1 seed this weekend

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee men's and women's basketball teams held a press conference on Tuesday afternoon to discuss the success of both programs and the upcoming Sun Belt Championships.

The tournament will be held in Hot Springs, Ark., March 8-11. The women's team will play on Saturday March, 9 at noon, followed by the men's team at 6:30 p.m. For more information on the tournament click [here](#).

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL HEAD COACH RICK INSELL

On the season so far:

"This 20 game schedule has been a grind. I am really proud of our ladies for going 17-3. We were in many, many close games on the road and at home. They prevailed and in the end kind of ran away with it. I think UALR was the closest with six losses. The three losses that we had were against Troy. At that time, that hadn't won a game in the conference. We just didn't play well that day and they came out and played hard. We lost to FIU and later on the road to Little Rock. I am really proud of our team. I think going into the tournament that we're ready. We've got to be tough minded. I know this bunch is tough minded. I was looking at stats this morning and Ebony has lost just four games in the Sun Belt in her career. I think that's phenomenal. Kortni's situation is the same way. When you look at athletes that have played in this conference for three four years and have only lost that amount of games, it tells you about the program you've got and the tough-minded athletes that we've got playing here."

On what it will take to win the conference tournament:

"The conference is pretty tough. We've got eight or nine teams that have shown they can play with anybody, not only in our conference but around the country. We've got some big wins as far as our conference is concerned. We're going to have to come ready to play from the get-go. There is no gimme."



On whether or not the team is ready for the tournament:

"I think you've got to look at the history. I think Middle Tennessee women's basketball basketball has always been a tournament team. Back before I came on board, Stephanie Smith won the conference tournament two years in a row. Back to even when Larry Joe (Inman) was in the OVC or when Lewis (Bivens) came along. They always had their teams ready when the tournament came. I think that's just something that goes along with tradition. We had that at Shelbyville and I see that same thing here at Middle Tennessee. There have been times that we haven't been playing so well, but when it came to the tournament, we were tough to handle. What we've gone through this year - our conference schedule, our non-conference schedule - not many teams had to go into Tennessee, or go to Iowa, or visit South Dakota State. That's pretty tough goings right there."

On what was learned from losses this season:

"What I took out of it? The hurt. Those were tough rides back to the house and I think the girls will tell you that. As far as I'm concerned, that's going to be something that motivates me. You're a championship team and you've to go finish those things off. That's something that motivates me and our staff and that's something that should motivate them as players."

JUNIOR FORWARD EBONY ROWE

On whether or not teams fear playing Middle Tennessee:

"I wouldn't say fear. I would say it's respect. I know that teams come and play their best game when they play Middle Tennessee. We're expecting that and we're ready to take on that challenge."

SENIOR GUARD KORTNI JONES

On whether or not teams fear playing Middle Tennessee:

"Depending on who you're playing, some teams are absolutely intimidated by us and some really come in and think they're capable of beating us. We've always had an "X" on our backs and it's been that way since I was a freshman. I feel like every team that comes to play us thinks they can win."

On the outlook of the tournament:

"I feel like a lot of teams in our conference are really good and I have a lot of respect for a lot of teams in our conference. I think that anybody is capable of winning it. Like Coach (Insell) said, Troy came in here and played really hard. If they go to Hot Springs and play just as hard as they played here then they can win it."

MEN'S BASKETBALL HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

Opening Statement:

"I think that when you play more conference games than anyone else in college basketball, it's a true test of a champion. When you can play a true round-robin schedule and come out with a 19-1 record and out-score your opponents by an average of 17 points, that's a good thing. We took off Sunday and Monday, and I think those were good days for our team to get rested and ready for the conference tournament."

On the mindset heading into the tournament:

"I think that our mindset is that these guys have done a lot of firsts. They've probably broken every record in the history of the school. But there's still one thing they haven't done, and that's win a conference tournament championship. We have to be focused on our team winning, and that's the complete mindset."

On what the team has to do to win the title:

"We have to rebound well. That means have a lot of energy. If we rebound well, our offense plays well, our bench plays well, that's what makes us good. So we need a big rebounding effort this week."

On using not getting in last year with an at-large bid as motivation this year:

"The message to our team is control your own destiny. Don't let the selection committee control that. The only thing we want them to control is seeding. I think our team has played with a little chip on their shoulder because of the tournament game last year. We are a much better team this year because these guys are older. We lost two good players, but we have a lot of experience on our team that has improved."

On if he feels they have done enough right now for an at-large bid:

"I think we absolutely have. You start looking at the facts at what we have done. We have the second most wins in college basketball and the second-longest winning streak in college basketball. Our non-conference strength of schedule is ninth. Our RPI is 25. These guys have won by an average of 17 every night. Our losses are at Belmont, at Akron, Florida, and an overtime loss. I think we have done exactly what we need to do."

SENIOR GUARD BRUCE MASSEY

On the loss in last year's quarterfinal being on his mind:

"We were the number one seed last year and got to the tournament, and Arkansas State beat us by out-playing us. We forgot what really got us to the No. 1 seed, and that was toughness and rebounding. We didn't re-create our identity in the game and down the stretch. Going into this tournament, every team will play us hard because we are the one seed, so we have to take on that challenge every night."

On using not getting in last year with an at-large bid as motivation this year:

"Last year, most of us were one-year players similar to freshmen. We really didn't know what it took to win a conference tournament. We thought we did enough to get to the NCAA tournament, and we found out the hard way we didn't. We don't want the same thing to happen this year. We know if we can win the next three games, we should have a good seed in the NCAA tournament."

SENIOR GUARD MARCOS KNIGHT

On whether this team is better equipped than a year ago to avoid an upset:

"I think this year's team is a little tougher than last year's team as far as rebounding. We have six seniors this year and something we always talk about is not losing in the first round or second round. We want to go to the championship and win because it's something we haven't done. That's something we will remember in practice every day."

On using not getting in last year with an at-large bid as motivation this year:

"Last year, we thought we would go in and win the conference tournament. We have to control our own destiny and not let the committee control our destiny for us. We need to win these next three games, but we will take it one game at a time and continue to get better in practice every day."

