

MT hosts C-USA season preview presser

Head coach Kermit Davis and senior Neiko Hunter speak with media

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Before the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team tips off the Conference USA slate and wraps up nonconference play at Tennessee State, head coach Kermit Davis and senior Neiko Hunter were on hand Monday to speak with the media about the remainder the 2013-14 campaign.

Head Coach Kermit Davis

Opening comments...

I know we are here to promote the Conference USA schedule, but for our team we have a huge game tomorrow

night. It is a game that we desperately need to play well in before conference play starts. We have been away from home; it has been a tougher stretch and the fifth-of-sixth game away from home. We have not found the identify of being a tough road team as we have been in the past. It is something that we have to continue to improve on.

We play a really dangerous Tennessee State team that probably has two First Team All-OVC players in (Patrick) Miller and (M.J.) Rhett. It is a good chance to go on the road and is always a tough place to play. We're looking forward to being on MyTV30. It has been great for all of our teams here at Middle. We look forward to the game on Tuesday night.

Do you need more consistency from the new guys like Jaqawn Raymond, Marcus Tarrance and Reggie Upshaw, Jr.?

We do. I know Neiko (Hunter) and Shawn (Jones) can sure be more consistent and can play at a higher level. Those two have been our most consistent guys. Especially in bigger games when we stay out of foul trouble. Kerry (Hammonds II) has been hampered by a foot injury and nobody tries to play with pain more than Kerry. He has done it his whole career and you can just tell he doesn't have as much lift. He is not going to use it as an excuse. He has got to start playing better.



Our wings, Marcus Tarrance needs to shoot the ball better and Jaqawn Raymond has been up and down. We need to get better play from Reggie Upshaw and Jacquez (Rozier). I think Reggie has done great for a freshman. Where we are right now, we need him to play bigger, tougher games and he will have to start that tomorrow night.

Is C-USA a balanced conference?

It is a really good league and when you start looking at it; UAB beat North Carolina, UTEP beat Tennessee, Charlotte won the Puerto Rico Shootout after beating Michigan in the championship game, Louisiana Tech beat Oklahoma and Southern Miss is one of the best teams, best road-teams in our league. It is a really good league.

We have to become a tougher, more physical team to be able to combat and go on the road with those teams.

Where does Middle Tennessee stand in comparison to other teams in the league?

Just based on some teams playing better up against quality competition, Southern Miss, UAB, Charlotte, Louisiana Tech, the teams I have mentioned have played better than us to this point. I think they have played better against upper echelon competition. Something we have been very good at in the past that we haven't done as well right now. We haven't proven ourselves on the road. Although, if you look at who we have played on the road: Cincinnati, Florida and Ole Miss, I think our team is a team that could finish seventh, eighth, ninth or we could win the league. I think that is the parody in the league and will make the conference games interesting, especially Saturday against UAB.

On the style of play in C-USA verses the Sun Belt...

I haven't seen every team play and have watched tape on six or seven of the teams we are going to play earlier. It is a better offensive league. Teams are playing faster. There are some really good players in the Sun Belt, but the talent level overall in C-USA is better. Just based on watching Charlotte beat Michigan and watching Louisiana Tech beat Oklahoma, the quality of play is better. There are 30-35 guys that could be first and second team all-league, based on what I have seen including some of our guys. There are some quality players.

Could this be a multi-bid league at this point in the year?

Southern Miss' RPI is around 27th, so at the end of the day if they didn't win the conference tournament, they would be an at-large bid. UAB has a chance because of the quality games they have. We would have to win a ton of games in a row or win the conference tournament, based on what we have done in nonconference, but you do have a chance to pick up more top-75, top-80 and top-90 wins over the next two months and you could put yourself in good position.

Have you played a conference schedule that has you traveling to multiple different sites like C-USA has? What unique challenges does that give you, your staff and your players?

I have not and I like the round-robin, like every coach does. The perfect scenario is to play each team home-and-home. Not all leagues have that because of the number of teams in all the leagues. I have usually been on two sides, where you play everybody twice. It is going to be different and

maybe not a true champion will be crowned because of the different teams you're playing and who is playing who where. I look forward to next year, when there is an east and a west and a format that is more consistent to crowning a true champion. It is going to be different but it is going to be fun. Ebony (Rowe) and Kim (Brewton) said the same thing. In the Sun Belt I was so comfortable; I knew where I was staying, where the gym was at, I knew where the locker room was. I knew everything. I knew the security guys at the door and they all knew me. It is all going to be different. We're going to have to get comfortable and find new places and I think it will be fun with us.

Is it challenging with having to learn the new conference schemes?

I find it fun. We saw all of these teams play, whether we are watching Little-Rock when they played in El Paso when scouting Little Rock. We have watched all of the teams play and are pretty familiar with all of the coaches. I think it makes our job a little more exciting because you get to prepare for different teams. The preparation, were I could watch this many hours of Western Kentucky because I have a great idea of what they have to start with. I think the work is more cumbersome for you and your staff to get familiar with all of the new teams, especially night-in and night-out.

At the mid-way point of the season, what is your impression on the new rules?

I think we have adjusted fine. Not every game is called just a like. That is what makes sporting events. Coaches may not substitute the right guard or call the right play. The officials are going to miss some calls and I think that is just where we are at. I think for the most part with us the officiating has been pretty consistent. We are averaging 76 points and I think scoring is up around college basketball. Are the two-point or three-point field goals up? No. Free throws are up so that is why scoring is up at this point. Across college basketball, people are understanding that this is going in the right direction of where it needs to go.

Senior Guard/Forward Neiko Hunter

How close is the team to where it needs to be?

We are a work in progress. We have to buy in and practice hard every day and bring what we do in practice to the game.

What did you do last year in a supporting role that the new guys can look at?

Last year we had great guys and the intensity that they brought to the floor, it came on to me. This year, I try to bring all of my intensity and passion for the game to practice and the game and get these guys to play off me sometimes.

Do you feel that the team is in a slump?

I don't think we are in a slump. We just have to play harder and strong and do what we do.

On embracing his new role...

I am good at playing in a role. Tweety (Knight), I can play off of him. Shawn (Jones), I can play off of him. Playing off my team, it helps me score to do a lot of good things for my team.

Thoughts on the league, regarding new teams...

It excites me a lot and provides a challenge. I like a challenge.

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