

Steve Peterson Q&A

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This could be the first time our MT Baseball team went to three straight NCAA Regionals, how do you feel about our chances?

I'm optimistic. I do think we have to rebuild the pitching staff, in the sense that we lost three quality starters that all went into professional baseball. I think our chances are good from what I've seen thus far. We are not going to have another Dewon Brazelton that was just head and shoulders better than so many other people, either on our team or on other teams.



There are only thirty first-round draft picks each year, and he was one of them. That definitely makes it more difficult, but I think we can put together a good pitching staff. My next concern is behind the plate. Only time can tell how we will do there. We have a sophomore and a freshman that can both step it up and have the tools to handle the pitching staff. I feel good about our shortstop and our outfield. We have a new second baseman that has the talent. I think we will be better at first base offensively. So I think our chances are good. Our chances will be even better if everyone else is worse than us. If everyone else is a lot better than they were last season, then it makes it more difficult. But I think we have a good chance to make a run at it. **How is the schedule shaping up for the Blue Raiders?**

We have a very good schedule. For example, we are opening up with Austin Peay State University, where national publications have picked them to win the Ohio Valley Conference and go to a regional tournament. Also out of the opening suit we play Tennessee Tech, who won their championship last year and have a lot of good players returning. Out of the Missouri Valley Conference, we're playing Southwest Missouri, which might be the best team we play all season; they just have some outstanding players and they are very strong team when they come here. We probably have one of the strongest non-conference schedules that we have ever encountered. In the conference, year-in and year-out teams like Florida International, South Alabama, Louisiana Lafayette and New Orleans always have outstanding teams. We saw last year that Arkansas State and Arkansas Little Rock were very good, solid, well coached teams. We play Western Kentucky every year that gives us battles, so it's going to be a rivalry type thing there. I think we are in for one of the most competitive schedules that we have ever been involved with. **We broke the attendance record last season; do you think that it is possible again for this season?**

Oh yeah. I look at coming to the ballpark as if I owned a store. If I can get you to the ballpark one

time, I think that it's my responsibility to get you back. From what I understand, season ticket sales are up. The enthusiasm is also higher than I've ever seen it. Now what we have to do is have an entertaining product on the field. The weather also has to fall into place. We had really good weather when the Sun Belt season got underway last season. I wouldn't be surprised, after it's all said and done, if we draw more than we did last year. I think it's on the up-and-up, the enthusiasm is high and people are having a lot of fun at the ballpark. **How does the Sun Belt look this season; where do we stand?**

We're picked right in the middle of the pack. We are picked fourth, where last year we were picked fifth. We won the championship and moved up one spot. We moved up one spot because Louisiana Tech dropped out of the league, so nothing has really changed. I look at us as being the new kid on the block last year, but I think that the people in the Sun Belt respect our program and knew about us long before we ever got into the Sun Belt. If we get off to a good start, unless there is just one team that is outstandingly better than everyone else, I think we'll be in the thick of it. So I believe that they have us picked about right. **On Friday, February 1, you unveiled plans to renovate various parts of the baseball complex, what are your plans concerning this project.**

I basically did it as if I was promoting a movie; we have coming attractions. We have been working on this since the end of last season. We had an architectural firm, which donated a lot of time to come up with some really neat computer-generated models. We don't have a timetable established, but you've got to start somewhere. What this does is gives us something to show and something to build towards. What I have to do is to organize a plan of how we are going to go about soliciting money. Alumni, former players, current players and the Middle Tennessee community sponsor it. Everyone is going to be involved with it. What I want to do is to make it real fan friendly, where fans can have a good time, where they get to a concession stand or a restroom conveniently. I would like to have a ballpark stadium type atmosphere, where the kids can play and then you can go watch a ball game. We have the area that we can do that in, so it's going to happen. It's going to be a joint venture of the athletic department and administration. **How does this year's team compare to that of last years?**

On the positive side, I believe that we can have more power. I think that it's a more athletic team. I'm not saying that we don't have it, but I haven't seen what kind of chemistry we're going to have or what personality the team is going to take, because it varies from year to year. We lost Josh Renick who signed with the Twins, who was a great player, but who was also a very good leader on and off the field. He could motivate people within the club. We lost a senior catcher named Kyle Thomas who had been around and was very settling for the pitching staff. So we are just going to have to have other guys who will step up. John Williams had a great freshman year being a Freshman All-American, but he's going to have to take another step up. A lot of people think that a transfer, Adam Larson, has all the tools to be a great pitcher for us. Personalities will fall in line, but last year was such a pitching dominated club. So hopefully we can have good, solid pitching this year and score some more runs. **Last year's team was a veteran team and this year's team is much younger with a lot of new faces, do you plan to change any of your coaching methods to compensate?**

No. What you see is what you get with me. I am a firm believer that you don't change personalities you change behavior. So maybe my behavior will change a little. I don't have much patience for mental mistakes out of senior ball players, but I just want the young players to play hard and learn from their mistakes. So I'm sure that I'm going to have to be a little more patient with the younger guys. **How do you plan to fill the void left by Brazelton's departure to professional ball?**

I don't. It might take three players. Once Dewon got going and got his arm in shape, there were very few times, on Friday, that I even got the bullpen going. Now, what that does is leaves your gun

loaded for Saturday and Sunday. So the situation may be that we will have to go to the bullpen more which affects Saturdays and Sundays. So that's why I say it might take three players. But we still plan on winning Friday night. In baseball, when you have that horse, when you have that bell cow on your pitching staff, that keeps you away from losing streaks. Hopefully John Williams can be a guy that can step up like that, or maybe Adam Larson. There is going to be somebody there, but to say that they will be of the same caliber as Dewon Brazelton, I'm not going to go there. **Last season we were narrowly beaten by UT in the Regional, do you think that will leave the team with a bad taste in their mouth or give them the hunger to go further this season?**

No. I'm not a big believer in motivation from the year before. I think that experience from the year before helps a lot. Having guys that played on the club last year, being in a NCAA regional, playing in front of four or five thousand people, shows them that there is a fine line between winning and losing a regional and advancing to a super regional. Tennessee beat us 2-1 on a squeeze bunt in the eighth inning. If you track them through the Super Regional up through the World Series, they scored a ton of runs. They got hot, but they had to get by us first, they had to get by Brazelton first, and they did, I take my hat off to them. The taste that that leaves in their mouth is a good taste, a taste of what it's like to get in the regional and that anything can happen once you get there. I want them to be motivated to get to a third straight regional. That's something that we've never done before. When you can get three in a row, which puts you in a bracket across the country that very few schools are able to do. It shows the stability of the program, the strength of your program and the strength of your administration. **Out of your new recruits, who is projected to make an immediate impact?**

We are giving the opportunity to Chad Cooper, who came out of a junior college, that we recruited to play second base, so he is going to get an immediate chance. Josh Archer, a freshman who is going to get an opportunity to catch. Two freshmen, one of which is going to play third base, Brett Carroll or Nate Jagers, will have an opportunity to make an impact. Pitching wise, Adam Larson, who is a transfer student, is going to get a chance to go out there and prove how good he is. All I want them to do is to be their best, before they can be the best. I'm probably leaving somebody out, I don't know whom it is, and it may be a returning player or a new player that will make an impact. Baseball is a marathon, not a sprint. You can be great the first third, playing five hundred the second and then stink the last third, or you can do totally opposite. Last year the club was very consistent all the way through, and that was because of the strength of our pitching. There may be someone who steps it up that we're not even talking about right now, but that's the neat part about it. **Do you have any predictions for the 2002 season?**

I predict that we are going to compete for the championship. That's easy to say simply because of the history of MTSU baseball. I just think that we have to reload, and people have to step up and do things. Do they have the talent to do so? Yeah, I really think so. My prediction is pretty much the same as last years; we plan to compete for the championship, and being picked forth or fifth really make no difference to me. **Is there anything that you would like to say to the Blue Raider fans?** It's really neat to see how my players react when there is a big crowd. When we go on the road to a lot of places that attract a lot of fans, and then to be able to come back home and see that same enthusiasm here gives them a lot of pride. A baseball player reacts to fans. You can hear everything that's going on, and there is a lot of dead time in baseball where they can enjoy the crowd, where in football in basketball they really don't get that chance. I think we need you, and I know the fans that attended last year, and there were thousands of them, had a good time and they will be back. You just have to be patient with this ball club and let it evolve the way it's going to be. But we really need you, and we can show you that if you had fun last year, you will have even more fun this year. It's a tradition that's been built, and it's going to just keep getting bigger and bigger.

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