

Q&A with Cindy Connelley

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This is your first year coaching at Middle Tennessee, are you bringing any special coaching methods to the program? I think it's probably education first, team unity second, and with that comes chemistry. You must first have that drive, and all three things must work together. You have to teach the fundamentals, have repetition, push, motivate, and the team has to have ownership. And what we're trying to do is see that it's successful and moves to the next level. **You have a good stable of pitchers; how is that going to help you as the season progresses?** We are experienced, but I don't think you can ever have enough pitching. Jennifer Martinez threw her first no-hitter against a ranked team on Saturday. Jen has charisma on the mound, she's got experience, and I think she holds every record, if not almost every record here at Middle. So when you have a pitcher of that caliber, obviously she is going to throw a lot of ball games for us. Stacy Preator is a proto-type pitcher, she's got the attitude, the physical skill and she's a junior. Then Amanda Kendall is coming off of an injury and she's worked really hard to get back. How ready she is, is going to be a growth type process, because she is going to have to get some innings on the mound. She had a very difficult first outing at the tournament. So they're going to have to just play and play a lot, and that's a nice position for a student/athlete to be in, to get that chance to compete. **Do you think that we are going to have to rely on Martinez a lot?** I think they continuously went to her last year, and we're going to distribute innings among the three. We need Jens bat in the lineup, and I think she's the fourth top hitter right now. If she's good enough to pitch a lot, then she's good enough to hit all the time, but our key is to keep her fresh. "Play through May" is one of our logos this year. In the spring semester, basketball is coming into their final four and a lot of the other teams are finished, but softball is just getting started.



If you just start in January, then you want to play through that last week in May. So you've got to keep all of them fresh and motivated, while they are improving their skills. So it's a long year for this team. We have to blend the new with the old and the old with the new. So it is a year of transition. I think it's been especially tough on the seven seniors, because they thought that they were going to come back to the same system, but it changed. They are responding and I think they are enjoying where we're headed, because we are trying to become a multidimensional team. We are trying to get more runs on the board and give more support to the pitching staff. I've seen pitchers throw near perfect games and then lose by one run. So you have got to have both parts of the equation. **How do you feel about your performance at the ULM Tournament?** It was an extremely tough time for us to go to the South, because most of the teams had already played in tournaments. I think one team had already played fifteen games, and we had not played yet. So any time you get on a bus and travel eleven hours, and you have only been outside for a week in practice with only one scrimmage under your belt, and then have to take the field and play Southern teams who had been outside. It is a very difficult schedule. I think to get that first Troy State win was very important, but we came back Saturday morning and lost to Texas A&M, which was a very tough loss for us. We just couldn't get the bats going. We could tell that we had gotten better, but we were just not in sync. But we came back, regrouped, and made a huge step between one o'clock Saturday afternoon and seven o'clock Saturday night. We really put it into another gear, we knew what we had to do, and we started pressing to become a good team instead of playing on the level of our competition. We dominated Tulsa that night. To do that after you have already played two games, that was a tremendous win for us. And then we had the Louisiana-Monroe game under control, it was 2-0 going into the sixth inning, but we made a couple of errors, which helped them to get on track. We finished third in the tournament, which was a fairly good early outing, but I would really like to go back and play that tournament again. **We have a tough schedule this season; how do you feel about that?** Well, that's the hand that has been dealt to us, and we are going to play it out, and it's going to make us a better team, and it's also going to make us a better coaching staff. We will defiantly be tested week-in and week-out, because there are no easy games on the schedule. Our goal is to win the Sun Belt Conference this year, and that is no easy task. We have Louisiana Lafayette who has won it every year, and you have a real good New Mexico State team that we tied with last year, and I really don't think you can look by Western Kentucky because they are a fairly local rival. Yes the schedule is very difficult, but it will make us better, and we will be ready for the Sun Belt Conference. **How important are the regional rankings?** Any time the Conference doesn't have an automatic bid, regional rankings can help get you into the World Series. You really have to have a 500 record to be considered, and right now we are at 2-3. We need to get above 500 because we do play such a difficult schedule. That's one way; there are a couple of different ways to make it. Our key is that we want to play our way into the World Series. If we get some help along the way, that will be fantastic. Any rankings are important, but right now when I look at the strength of our schedule, and where we are with a team that's still adjusting to a new staff, I think you have to be a little more realistic than that. We have to win the Sun Belt Conference. That's the key for us, and then if not, we've got to win the tournament. **We have Louisiana Lafayette coming here this year; how important is it that we get to play them at home?** You always want the home field advantage, and I really wish that we had more home games than what we do. The crowd helps you and the familiarity can help you, or it may hinder you. I think you are sometimes sharper when you're playing away. At that point in the season we should be a fairly polished ball team. We are really grateful to take the advantage of the home field. **We are only hosting eight home games this season; does that make it difficult for us?** We are fortunate to have eight home games, because we only had about two or three when we first came in, so we've scrambled to pick up several other opponents.

That's just the schedule that exists, but we are just going to have to fight through that. We are just going to have to find a silver lining. **What are the plans concerning the upgrading of the facility?** The athletic department and the administration understand the importance of a world-class facility. That is evident in our football stadium, our weight room, our academic advancement center, our track and our baseball facility. I think that softball and soccer are the next two teams in the master plan. So we are excited, we want to help and be a part of that. We have a lot of blue prints, so we are very close, but we just don't have any dates yet.

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