

2006-07 PREVIEW

CAMPUS FACT

The University of Memphis has received more than \$44 million in external funding for research since 2005. The College of Education, in conjunction with the Memphis City Schools, received a \$2.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to fund the Striving Readers Program. The grant is one of the largest ever awarded for reading research in an urban school district. The College of Education is home to five national professional journals and the College's New Teacher Center was recently awarded an Academic Excellence Award by the Tennessee Board of Regents. The rehabilitation counseling graduate program through the College of Education is among the nation's top 40.

With eight newcomers and the entire coaching staff returning in Blair Savage-Lansden's third season, the Lady Tigers are poised for big things to happen in 2006-07. With all eight new players having solid backgrounds in the motion offense and with the five returnees having learned the offense last season, the team is ready to tackle the high expectations for the upcoming season.

THE SCHEDULE

Unlike last season when Memphis played five of their first seven games away from the Elma Roane Fieldhouse, the coaching staff put together a schedule that includes a stretch where the Lady Tigers play seven of eight games at home. Similar to last season, the Lady Tigers will open the regular season on the road, playing in an exempt tournament at former league rival Louisville. There, Memphis will face Winthrop in its regular season opener, then will face the University of Dayton and the University of Louisville (both formerly Lady Tiger conference foes in the history books) on each of the next two days (Nov. 11th and 12th, respectively). Memphis will then return home for a pair of non-conference match-ups with Samford (Nov. 17) and Louisiana-Monroe (Nov. 20) before hosting the 22nd Annual Lady Tiger Classic. Austin Peay, Lipscomb and Central Arkansas (in its first season at NCAA Division) will join Memphis in the tournament which will be held Nov. 24-25th.

Memphis will then venture out on the road for a game at likely pre-season top 10 Georgia, Nov. 29th. The Bulldogs were 23-9 last season and capped a year filled with numerous injuries No. 12 in the Associated Press year-end poll. The Andy Landers-coached team advanced to the Sweet 16 for the 16th time in 23 trips in the NCAA Tournament and will pose a stiff test on the road for a young Lady Tiger team playing the program's first-ever game in Athens, Ga.

December will feature four straight home games for the Lady Tigers, as Memphis hosts Creighton, Southeastern Louisiana, Arkansas and UT Martin before breaking for final exams. Following exam week and the holiday season, the Lady Tigers will wing to San Antonio, Texas, where they will participate in the UTSA Classic, Dec. 29th and 30th, be-

fore opening the Conference USA schedule in January. At the UTSA Classic, Memphis will face Kentucky, a team that could also be in the pre-season rankings, along with host UTSA to cap a difficult non-conference schedule.

The Lady Tigers will then open C-USA play Jan. 2nd when UAB comes to town. In all, Memphis will host all the other East Division teams (East Carolina, Marshall, Southern Miss, UAB, UCF) and will also host defending champ Tulsa, Tulane and SMU out of the West Division. All that will be done with an eye on the Conference USA championship, hosted this year by Tulsa, Mar. 1-3.

THE ROSTER

In addition to a heavily-home game laden schedule, the make-up of the Lady Tigers will be the biggest change from last season, but Memphis still returns three of its five starters. Senior guard Devin Necaise will

be the team's leading returning scorer, having stepped up her scoring average from 4.8 points her sophomore year to 14.4 points per game last season. Necaise connected on 56 three-point field goal attempts on the season, tying Kitty Allen for the second-most threes in a single in Lady Tiger history. Conference USA Sixth Player of the Year Paris Leonard also returns, after averaging 12.8 points and 4.7 rebounds per game as a freshman coming off the bench for the Lady Tigers. Junior guard Gresh Gorman is also back after battling through mono and her asthma all last season. The Southaven, Miss., product played in all 28 games, starting the last 25 straight, and averaging 4.8 points and 2.8 rebounds per game while finishing fifth on the team with 30 steals.

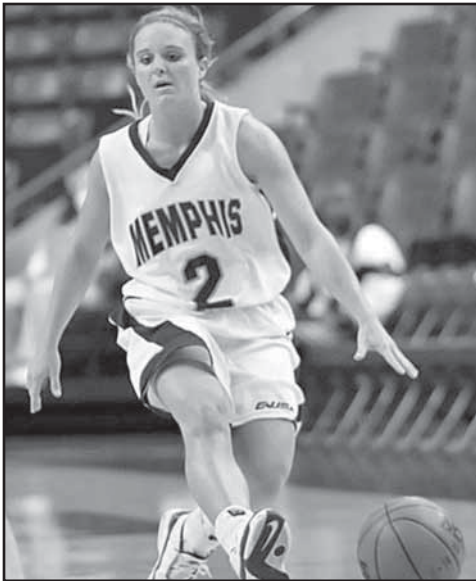
THE BACKCOURT (8)

The guard position will be competitive and a strength of the 2006-07 roster. Led by senior Devin Necaise, junior returnee Gresh



LADY TIGER BASKETBALL

2006-07 Preview



Gresh Gorman battled through mono last season, still playing in all 28 games.

Gorman, redshirt sophomore Jessica Hall and sophomore Paris Leonard, the backcourt adds Hope Adams (Oxford, Miss.), Se'erra Fantroy (Lincoln, Neb.), Jazmyn Green (DeSoto, Texas) and Adria Phillips (Fort Smith, Ark.) for this season, all of the newcomers having come from highly-regarded high school programs.

Memphis was potent beyond the arc last season with Necaise (56), Leonard (43) and now-graduated Tamika Butler (50) all knocking down a number of looks. The 154 three-point field goals made was a school record and the 2006-07 team may be even more potent with the newcomers entering the program with some of the Lady Tiger front line members also carrying some range.

The additional guard spots also have some pieces in place for the upcoming season. In addition to Necaise, the backcourt also returns junior Gresh Gorman, redshirt sophomore Jessica Hall, sophomore Paris Leonard and the addition of freshman Hope Adams.

Necaise drew the attention of C-USA scouting reports and after a slow start to the season, found her shooting stroke and an ability to take over games, finishing 10th in the league in scoring. With so many more weapons on offense, the pressure is off Necaise to match her 439 attempts from the field last year. Necaise scored more points last year (396) than she did in her first two

years combined, and with 734 career points, she could be the next Lady Tiger to the 1,000 career point mark depending on how many looks she gets in an offense with more weapons. League opponents also now know that Necaise developed her ability to score off the drive last season, so she may figure more into the Lady Tiger passing game with her scoring ability firmly in the minds of the Lady Tiger opponents' defenses.

Gorman played in all 28 games despite playing through the after-effects of mono. She spent the summer continuing her recovery, but her tenacity last season and a short Lady Tiger bench made it hard to keep her off the floor to rest last season.

Hall is coming off a pair of surgeries last season. The redshirt sophomore played in all 29 games as a freshman and her on-the-ball defense helped earn her Team Defensive MVP honors at the end of the 2004-05 season. Hall also has some range and was a 2,000-point scorer as a prep player. How confident she is after a year rehabilitating and how soon she finds her shooting stroke will determine where she fits into the lineup and how often she can make it onto the court during a game.

The Conference USA Sixth Player of the Year, Leonard returns after a normal up-and-down freshman year. Leonard got a quick start to her Lady Tiger career, scoring 334 points, the sixth-best single season in scoring by a Lady Tiger freshman. She averaged 12.8 ppg, becoming the first Lady Tiger freshman since Lady Tiger great Tamika Whitmore to average double-digit scoring. Her 43 three-point field goals made was the second-best season ever for a Lady Tiger freshman, trailing LaTonya Johnson's 47 threes made in 1994-95. Leonard also added 45 steals on the season and her 4.7 rebounds per game was third on the team.

Adams comes in with a bit of a chip on her shoulder after not signing until the late signing period and should step on the court with something to prove to detractors. The Oxford, Miss., product averaged 19 points per game as a prep player and will look to bring that scoring to the college game.

Graduated point guard Tamika Butler may be the program's biggest loss at the guard spot, as she played 903 out of a possible 1,120 minutes (81%) at the point for

Memphis. Butler was also a threat to fill it up from beyond the arc, capping her four-year career with 137 career threes, which is third-best all-time. She also added a team-high 115 assists last season and led the team with 53 steals. Who will fill that position at the point will be one of the first questions the Lady Tigers try to answer.

Incoming freshmen Jazmyn Green and Se'erra Fantroy will figure into the mix at the point and the pressure will be both of the freshmen to grow quickly into the point spot and get comfortable with running the team. Jessica Hall played some time at the point in 2004-05 in emergency situations, but whether the returnee will be comfortable running the point with the team in a new offense or in being the point for a pressure defense will be one of the first questions the Lady Tigers can answer once practice starts.

THE FRONT COURT (5)

Memphis will have five players who fit in the mix at a forward spot, the most depth a Savage-coached team has had in her three seasons at Memphis. Graduated Jamie Bradley's inside presence will especially be missed because of her long wingspan, which helped her stuff 33 blocks last season, the highest single season total since Tamika Whitmore posted 46 blocks during 1997-98



Megan Gooch is the team's lone returning player in the front court.

and the ninth-best single season total in Lady Tiger history.

Senior Megan Gooch will be the lone returning post for Savage after starting 24 games last year and averaging 3.6 points and 5.0 rebounds per game. Gooch also added a career-best 19 blocked shots and her conditioning meant that she could be on the floor for a lot of minutes, averaging 28.0 minutes per game last year, third on the team behind Necaise and Butler.

While Memphis does not have a lot of size up front, the Lady Tigers have addressed a weakness from last season in signing athletic forwards who can put the ball on the floor and draw defenders away from the guards on the outside.

Junior college transfer Aroha Jennings will fit in here, bringing her slashing style of play from Dodge City Community College. A complete basketball player, Jennings will be a threat to score off the drive or to pull up and shoot from deep in the court. In junior college, Jennings was especially a threat to drive and convert or to get herself to the free-throw line.

A late signing and total surprise for the Lady Tigers was Ashley Thornton. A sophomore, the 6-0 Thornton was a member of the Big South All-Freshman team, but became available to the Lady Tigers when Birmingham Southern announced its intentions to move to NCAA Division III in 2007-08.



Paris Leonard's 334 points ranked sixth-best by a Memphis freshman.



Jessica Hall underwent two surgeries in 2005-06 after being named the team's Most Valuable Defensive Player as a freshman.

Thornton gives Memphis another slashing type player on the roster, and with her already having some experience at the NCAA Division I level, could find her way to the floor for playing time early.

Two newcomers round out things up front, as Texas prep products Alysse Davis (Corpus Christi, Texas) and Robin Jones (Waco, Texas) will each step into a Lady Tiger uniform to give Savage more weapons down low than she had in the previous two seasons. The 6-1 Davis has some impressive range from beyond the arc and will help stretch some defenses, while 6-0 Jones will give Memphis help down low defending opposing posts who dominated Memphis at times last season.

THE COACHES

Coach Savage finally got the fluctuation in her coaching staff to settle down, returning every member of her staff following last season. The staff made the difficult decision last year to switch the team to a motion offense despite not having the ideal personnel in place for the move. But the idea was to

get the returning players some background in the motion offense and to recruiting prep players that knew what to do in the motion offense so that the team could hit this season with a more solid fundamental background. With a schedule that featured three nationally-ranked opponents and some difficult road trips, last season made the offensive switch that much more difficult, and when the Lady Tiger bench depleted to just seven healthy players for a game late in the conference stretch, the staff could just try to put pieces in place for the upcoming season.

The newcomers to the program in 2006-07 are the first recruiting class that any Savage coaching personnel has gotten to see since their junior seasons in prep basketball. With the desire to recruit players who knew what to do in the motion offense, Savage also signed athletes who played basketball all year, playing in a number of AAU and summer league opportunities, and who came from successful prep programs. All those pieces being now in place should mean that this season is the first time Lady Tiger fans can see Savage's stamp on the program start to be defined.