

THURSDAY
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Do you think the selection process for Gore's class is fair?

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An editorially independent newspaper

SIDELINES

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New director fosters growth

By Courtney Huckabay
Managing Editor

The MTSU Division of Student Affairs recently appointed Charles Gregory as interim director for Campus Recreation for the second time in his career at this university.

Gregory officially took the position Jan. 6 after approval was given from the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office, Human Resource Services and Student Affairs.

David Hays, associate vice president for Student Affairs, made the decision to appoint Gregory with no qualms.

"It didn't make sense to do a search for an interim director when Charlie was right here and capable of handling the position," Hays said.

Former Recreation Director Glenn Hanley announced his resignation in October, when he was offered a similar position at the University of Florida. He left MTSU with some big shoes to fill after helping the campus recreation department grow from one full-time staff member in the Alumni Memorial Gym to nine full-time members in the recently constructed Recreation Center since 1980.

But Gregory seems up to the challenge.

"Well, I'm liking it so far," Gregory said. "It sure keeps me busy, running from one meeting to the next. But that's what the job calls for and I'm ready to do it."

Gregory grew up in Nashville and is familiar with the region. He graduated

from MTSU in 1984 with a bachelor's degree in outdoor recreation. He then went into MTSU's graduate program where he earned his master's degree in 1986 with an emphasis in recreation, and he also worked as a graduate assistant in the Campus Recreation Office during that time.

From 1986-1987, he held the same position he holds now. Previous to this year's appointment, he was associate director of Campus Recreation Facilities and Informal Recreation.

Gregory said he plans to apply for the permanent director's position in a few weeks when the opening is announced. Hays is in the process of finishing paperwork and forming a

See Gregory, 3



Photo by Matthew H. Starling | Chief Photographer

Charles Gregory, the interim Recreation Center director looks out over the nearly full parking lot of the Rec Center Tuesday.

Catnapped: Students fight university to save cats on campus

By Jenny Cordle
Staff Writer

Concerned students pushing to save the lives of cats living on campus are asking the university to find an alternative other than extermination.

To help save two litters of remaining kittens, maintenance workers may stop taking stray cats living on campus to the Humane Society, said Watson Hannah, director of planning and projects for Academic Affairs.

Several kittens living under the Modular Buildings between the Learning Resource Center and Wood-Felder Halls, have been taken to the Animal Shelter of Rutherford County where they are exterminated upon arrival because of a lack of space in the facility.

"The animals were taken to the Humane Society because there have been several complaints from students who live in dorms

See Cats, 3



Photos by Jenny Cordle | Staff

(Top left) The third kitten rescued by freshman Jody Drake. (Bottom left) A male cat checks out the contents of the cage which Drake uses to take the rescued cats to Happy Tails. (Right) Drake and junior Holly Smith look in on the newly rescued kitten outside of the Modular Buildings.

Response to Gore's course stunning

By Jason Cox
Staff Writer

Response to the community building course slated to be taught by former Vice President Al Gore was overwhelming.

A total of 353 juniors, seniors and graduate students signed up for the course, said Doug Williams, director of News and Public Affairs.

Only 125 students were allowed into the course, and a lottery to determine who would be admitted into it was held early Wednesday afternoon.

The first course, to be taught Monday at 4 p.m., is an introductory class discussing the basics of communities. Williams said that the rest of the syllabus has yet to be finalized.

Gore's class will be held in the State Farm Lecture Hall in the Business and Aerospace Building.

In addition, Gore "will have other experts that will assist in the class," Williams said.

In addition to the course, MTSU will be part of a national consortium on creating a community building curriculum, said Williams. Other schools involved include the University of California at Los Angeles, Vanderbilt University and Michigan State University. ♦

Campus organizations give variety of choices to students

By Angelica Journagin
Staff Writer

MTSU offers a variety of organizations that students can get involved in on campus.

Being a member of a student organization can offer several benefits.

"Participation in a student organization can assist you in learning how to interact with others, developing leadership skills and broadening exposure to issues and ideas," said Maggie Prugh, coordinator of Student Organizations and Community Service.

With over 150 student organi-

zations on campus, ranging from special interest groups like the White Water Club to departmental organizations like the French Club, there should be an organization for everyone.

But, for those who see a lack in what MTSU has to offer, the Department of Student Life gives the opportunity for students to start their own club.

"Starting a new student organization is not a complicated process," Prugh said.

To start a club at MTSU, a student needs to organize five other students and a faculty advisor and needs to fill out the paperwork. After 30 days and approval by the

dean of Student Life, the organization has access to all of the resources MTSU has to offer.

"In all of the years that I have been in this office, no one has been denied approval," said Prugh, who is in her third year as coordinator. "No restrictions are placed on new clubs, except they have to be limited to students. Student organizations are allowed to conduct business as the way most beneficial to the group."

This open policy has inspired several new student organizations in the past year, including Jah People and College Democrats.

Jah People is the College Outreach Ministry of Temple

Baptist Church. Established in 2000, the club is making plans to take a mission trip to Mexico and then to China in 2002.

"It was easy to organize Jah People," said president Greyson Billingham.

Billingham started Jah People when she discovered only student organizations were allowed to set up booths at CUSTOMS, a summer orientation program offered to new students.

When asked why she wanted to start a student organization, Billingham replied, "I wanted to reach out to other college students."

Another organization in the

process of becoming a student organization is the College Democrats.

"College Democrats is about involving students in the community," said president Haley Hopper, "and allowing them to voice concerns and participate in the actions of not only the community, but also the state government."

The future goals of the College Democrats involve increasing membership and establishing a credible reputation on campus. They also plan to start preparing for the state races in 2002 and a student trip to Washington D.C. this summer.

Hopper saw a need for College Democrats when she came on campus this spring and saw only a listing for College Republicans.

"I took the initiative to start College Democrats, and so far, there has been a good response," said Hopper.

She hopes, that with the arrival of former Vice President Al Gore on campus, more students will become aware of the issues.

"The hardest part about starting [a student organization] is the apathy on campus," said Hopper.

A complete listing of Student Organizations can be found at the Student Life homepage at www.mtsu.edu/~stuaff/slif. ♦

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CRIME LOG

Compiled By Matthew Kelly - Police Reporter

The following is a partial list of incidents responded to by the MTSU Police Department between Jan. 29, 2001, and Feb. 6, 2001. This log was compiled from the actual police reports.

Harassing phone calls plague female student

Jan. 28, 5:45 p.m. — Monohan Hall — A female student met with an officer at the police station the afternoon of Jan. 29 to report harassing phone calls she received at her Monohan Hall room the previous evening.

She had just returned to her room when she received a call from a male who told her he had watched her walk into her room and that she was wearing a red sweater. She was, in fact, wearing a red sweater at the time.

In addition, two messages from a male caller were left on her answering machine several hours later. The first time, someone said, "You are a f**king bitch." The second message left was: "You are a whore."

The victim stated that the messages sounded like they came from a different individual than the one who made the earlier call. She said the caller sounded angry and possibly intoxicated. She had no idea who might be calling her. The officer took a report and told the victim he would investigate the case. ♦

Grandmother allegedly threatens to shoot student

Jan. 31, Noon — Corlew Hall — An officer was dispatched to speak with a male and female student in reference to threatening phone calls. The male student said he was being harassed by the female student's grandmother and that he feared for his safety.

The victim stated that the grandmother repeatedly called his room, demanding to know the whereabouts of her granddaughter. The student said when he doesn't tell her, she threatens him. She has reportedly said to him, "I will get you," and "I will shoot you."

The officer took a report and advised the victim how to obtain a warrant against the grandmother. He then escorted both students to the Judicial Commissioners Office so the victim could begin the warrant process. ♦

Armed men reportedly assault student in dorm

Feb. 6, 12:50 a.m. — Nicks Hall — An officer met

with a male student at the police station the evening of Feb. 6. The student told the officer that around 12:50 a.m., two males had entered his Nicks Hall dorm room and assaulted him.

One of the men asked the victim if he had the keys to a Lexus truck. The victim stated that this same individual had been to his room before looking for the same set of keys. The victim told the intruder he didn't know anything about the keys.

The suspect had a stun gun and struck the victim five times — twice on the left leg, once on the left shoulder, once in the palm of his left hand and once on the left rib cage. The suspect is described as a black male, 5 feet 6 inches tall, with a mustache and a slight beard. He was wearing a Green Bay Packers hat, a black jacket and Levis.

The other male who entered the room stood by the door and had an automatic blue steel weapon in his waistband. He is described as a black male, 6 feet tall, with a slim build. He was wearing a black leather jacket with a hood and black snap-up pants. ♦

Student charged with DUI, felony introduction of drugs into penal system

Feb. 2, 2:25 a.m. — Health Services parking lot — While on patrol, an officer observed the vehicle in front of him repeatedly swerving across the center line. The officer followed the vehicle for a short while before initiating a traffic stop as it pulled into the Health Services parking lot.

The officer approached the vehicle and asked the driver for his driver's license. He noticed the driver appeared to be "slow and lethargic in his movements and speech," and that there was a smell of marijuana about the driver and the vehicle.

He then asked the driver to step out of the vehicle to perform some field sobriety tests. The officer noted that his speech was "slurred and belabored and he appeared confused and disoriented" throughout the tests, although his balance seemed to be OK.

He asked the driver if there were any drugs in the vehicle, and the driver stated there were none. The officer then asked for permission to search the vehicle and its contents, and the driver consented.

Before searching the vehicle, the officer asked the passenger to step out of the car. He noticed a strong smell of marijuana emanating from the passenger as well.

Upon searching the vehicle, the officer discovered a green plant substance consisting of several stems and seeds in the ashtray that appeared to be marijuana, as well as a finger scale and a pipe screen. The officer then

placed the driver under arrest.

Jared L. Martin, 19, of 122 County Road 750 in Athens, Tenn., was charged with driving under the influence — first offense, simple possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.

The officer also placed the passenger under arrest "since his actions and appearance indicated he was heavily under the influence of an intoxicant and that he might present a danger to himself if left" in public. The passenger, Robert C. Vaughn, 20, of 230 Rose Ave. in Athens, Tenn., was charged with public intoxication.

Both subjects were transported to the Rutherford County Jail.

The officer explained to the driver that if he had any drugs on him he should not bring them into the jail because a misdemeanor possession charge could turn into a felony charge. Martin denied that he had any drugs on him. When the officer was getting ready to search him at the jail, however, Martin confessed that he had a bag of marijuana in his crotch. The bag was retrieved and found to contain approximately one-quarter ounce of what appeared to be marijuana. Martin was consequently also charged with felony introduction of drugs into the penal system.

Vaughn's bond was set at \$250. Martin's was set at \$12,000. Both subjects are scheduled to appear before the Rutherford County General Sessions Court March 29. ♦

Officers involved in scuffle at Kwik Sak on Greenland

Feb. 4, 1:29 a.m. — Kwik Sak on Greenland Drive — While exiting the store, an officer passed a male entering the store who appeared disoriented and "unsteady on his feet."

When the individual exited the store, the officer approached him to make sure he was OK. The subject appeared very intoxicated and had slurred speech and a odor of alcohol coming from him. The officer decided that it would be dangerous for the individual's health if he were left in public.

A backup officer arrived. When the two officers attempted to place the subject under arrest, he tried to prevent them from placing handcuffs on him and then began fighting with them. They wrestled the subject to the ground and eventually got him into custody.

Dennis Edwin Arnoneit, 36, of 1706 N. Tennessee Blvd. in Murfreesboro, was charged with public intoxication, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. He was then transported to the Rutherford County Sheriff's Office where bond was set at \$2,250. Arnoneit is due to appear before the Rutherford County General Sessions Court March 13. ♦

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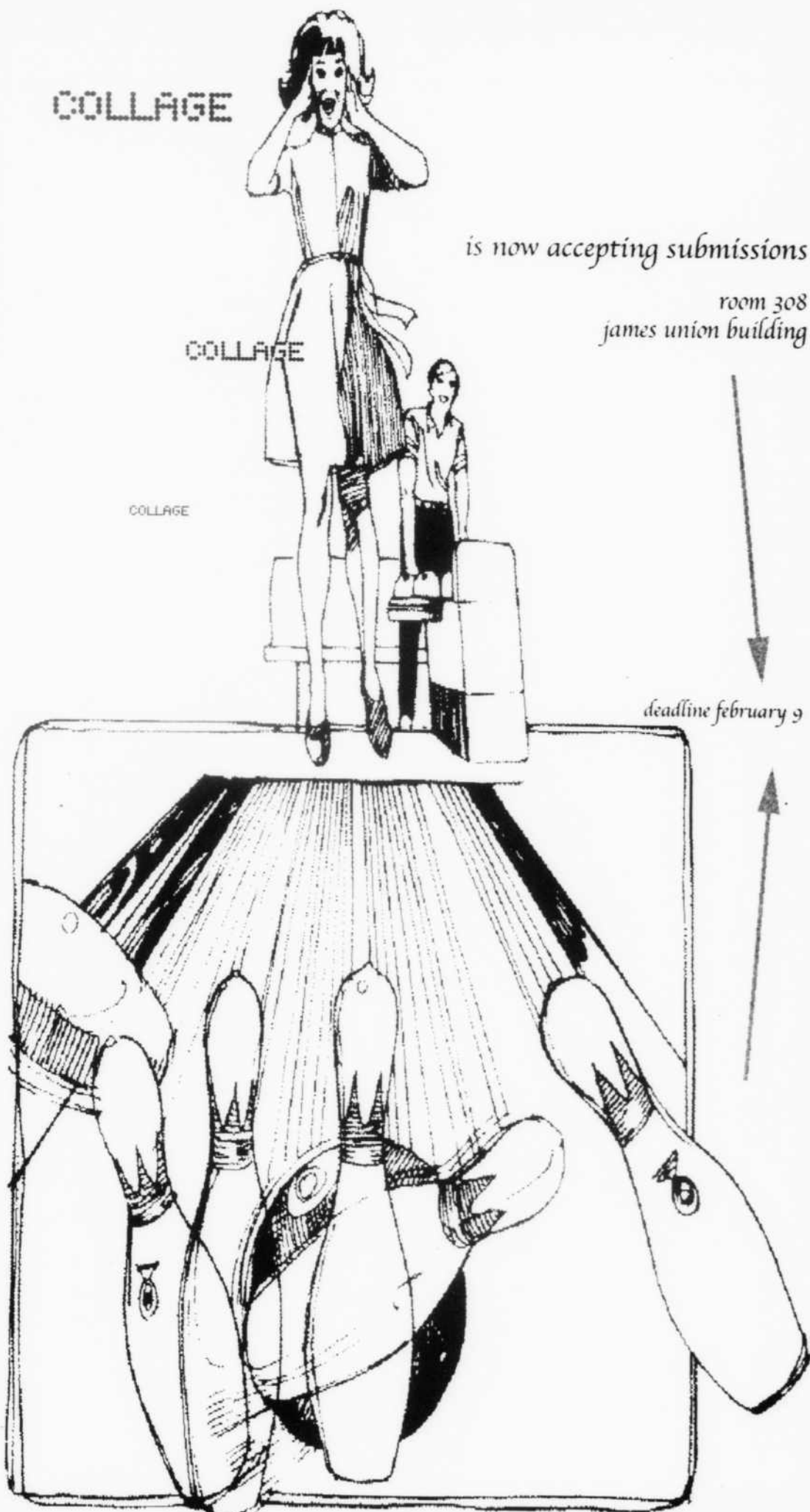




Photo by Matthew H. Starling | Chief Photographer

A student takes to the air as he spends Tuesday afternoon practicing his moves on the steps of Peck Hall. He had nothing to do that afternoon and wanted to get in some skating.

Cats: Students petition

Continued from 1

nearby," said Hannah. "With other students feeding the cats, it attracts skunks and possums which poses a health issue."

Freshman Jody Drake, who's captured three kittens in a week by luring them with tuna, said she thinks it's "silly" to take them to the pound when there are alternative facilities nearby.

Drake has fostered four kittens from Happy Tails, a no-kill facility in Franklin, and said they'd be happy to take the kittens once they've been vaccinated.

Drake was at the Modular Buildings Wednesday with fliers and petitions in hand ready to inform the students about the university's actions when she found out her suggestion to take the kittens to a no-kill facility may be accepted.

Drake was told earlier in the week that she couldn't take the kittens because of liability reasons, but Hannah said she liked the idea of taking the cats to another facility.

"I'm not opposed to that," she said, "if we could get some individuals willing to help take the cats to the vet or the facility."

Drake's attempts to catch a kitten today were successful.

She managed to snap the cage door shut in time as a group of students watched silently to avoid scaring the timid kitten.

One of the students, senior Fred Buckley, said he tried to capture four or five cats a few days ago and even spent three hours one night feeding them tuna, "but they went right back in the hole."

"I think it's pathetic that they'd kill them," Buckley said. "There's no reason for it when they have this many students who want them."

James Luter, manager of Ground Services, said the cats have become more of a nuisance to students.

"We were doing the main thing by taking them to the Humane Society," said Luter. "But we're not in the business of killing cats. We're just trying to do what's right for the modulars, students and professors."

Luter said they haven't tried to capture a cat in a week because they've been busy with other duties.

Students Liz Thompson, Holly Smith and Buckley plan on signing the petition which will make its rounds tomorrow.

Drake is currently trying to gather students for a Monday meeting to "figure out a plan to implement students monitoring cages" so the cats can be taken to a facility. Drake can be

Spring elections for the Student Government Association are March 5-7, with voting to take place on WebMT. There will be a debate on Channel 10 March 1 for the prospective candidates for: President, Speaker of the Senate, Speaker of the House (depending on referendum) and Senate at-Large seats (depending on referendum). Students interested in running can pick up election packets in the SGA office and they must be turned in by Feb. 9.

Gregory: Expansions planned for Recreation Center

Continued from 1

recruitment plan for the position, which has to undergo approval from the EOAAO.

Hays said there won't be a time limit set for the application process, so Student Affairs can get the largest number of applicants interested.

"We'll review applications until we find someone to fill it," he said.

He expects to have the director's seat filled by the first part of summer, but isn't worried about rushing the process along.

"We're not in a tremendous hurry because Charlie's got a handle on it, and he knows what students want and what they're used to," Hays said.

In the meantime, Gregory has his hands full planning the expansion of the Rec Center. The recreation staff have proposed an \$8 million expansion which includes enlarging the weight room and the cardiovascular area and adding more aerobics rooms, a martial arts studio, meeting rooms and storage space.

The plan would also expand

and add lights to the rugby field, build a new and larger outdoor equipment storage facility, add outdoor tennis courts and outdoor basketball courts, which would also serve as a in-line skating area.

Right now, Gregory is waiting for approval of the plan from the Student Government Association, because most of the cost of the expansion will come from an increase in the student activity fee.

"If everything goes as planned, it should only cost students \$5 to \$10 more a semester," Gregory said.

He also said some additional funding will come from alumni and rental fees.

Gregory has created a student survey that gives Rec Center patrons an opportunity to express what they would like to change about the Rec Center and how much they are willing to pay for those changes.

"We don't want to use students' money without their approval first," Gregory said. "So the survey should come in pretty handy." ♦

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From the staff

Not everyone's happy about Gore teaching at MTSU

We must admit, we got caught up in all the hoopla of Al Gore teaching on our very own campus.

Some of us raced around like monkeys just trying to get a glimpse of the man and even asked him to prom (we won't mention any names).

We've written several editorials voicing our support for Gore as a teacher and the university president. But amidst all this hype and giddiness, we've forgotten some pieces of the puzzle.

Not everyone is happy that Al Gore is teaching here, nor are they happy about what he'll be teaching.

The *Sidelines* staff noticed signs all over campus encouraging students to protest against Gore when he's on campus for his first class Monday.

Solidarity has planned a protest march for Feb. 12 starting at the JUB at 2:45 p.m.

The group plans to march across campus at 3 p.m. and end up at the BAS by 4 p.m. when Gore's class starts.

The protestors are upset because Gore is teaching about building better and solid communities when he has been part of a larger force that is involved in globalization and imperialism, according to their posters.

Our staff supports their decision to protest as fellow believers and participants in the First Amendment. Solidarity and its followers are simply exercising their right of free expression.

This campus should have more of that - maybe it would bring more of us together.

It's nice to see that other students are concerned about "the other side of the story."

Thanks for reminding us.

Avoid crappy part-time jobs

I'm pretty sure that everyone who is in college now is here to make their lives better, if not immediately, then at least sometime down the road.

Maybe you're here to learn more about business, and position yourself for a high-paying office job that will numb your brain permanently but provide you with many nice possessions.

You could be here to learn how to give back to the community in ways such as social services or teaching. You might be here to escape living at home. Whatever the reason, you want to improve your life.

But there is a price to pay, and I'm not talking about tuition. More than likely, if you are in college, you have a love/hate relationship with money. You really want to spend it, but you don't have any, and everything is too expensive for what's in your budget. It tears me up to not be able to buy something trivial like a used cd, because I have to save that money to eat. I'm sure you can relate.

So what are we forced to do to come up with the extra cash? It's something I just can't bring myself to do right now, and that is to take a terrible part-time job. Now maybe I've just had terrible luck with the jobs I've had since being in college, but I doubt I'm the only one. Most of the jobs college students can get just plain suck. They truly drain the life out of me.

Many of our schedules are so busy from day to day, we have no choice but to take jobs at places that will gladly work around your schedule. So that means most of the jobs we get are at a restaurant, retail store, video store or bar. I know some of you landed that perfect job your freshman year that pays \$9 an hour, lets you make your own schedule and gives you bonuses every other week. You are the lucky ones and need to stop reading this. So get on the phone and thank your boss, who is probably more of a friend than a boss to you.

Since this is my last semester in college, I've decided not to sacrifice my sanity for money and I'm living bare bones without a part-time job. My bills are piling up and my cat is eating better than I am, but it's worth it. I just don't think I can take another job that makes me feel like I don't really need a brain to exist. I prefer to max out my loan money and stretch it farther than it's meant to be, rather than take orders from some redneck who has worked for

Brian Spencer
Staff Columnist



Mind Manifestations

15 years to rise to the position of "associate assistant to the shift manager" at K-Mart or somewhere like that.

The other night, after eating a can of pinto beans for dinner again, I sat down and really considered getting a job. I thought to myself, "Brian, stop being such a baby. You'll only need to keep this job for a few months, so just suck it up and do it. C'mon, we'll go buy ourselves some new stuff with the first paycheck." Then I realized that was the little devil on my shoulder talking, not the happy leprechaun. The leprechaun chimed in and told me all the reasons why I didn't have a job already. This set me straight. Here are some of the things my friendly leprechaun reminded me of. Maybe you can identify with some of them.

The Work Schedule

- For some reason, at jobs that require little or no education, the dumbest people get to be in charge of making the schedule. It seems like making a schedule would be an easy thing to do, but apparently it's not.

How many times have you put in a request for a day off, a month in advance, only to see that you have to work a double on that day? Then, when you ask whoever it is what happened, they act indifferent and say it's your responsibility to get the shift covered. I swear, some of these people want to grow up to be God. Have you ever worked someplace where, instead of just firing you, they slowly cut your hours until you were forced to quit? It's amazing how childish and unfair people get when put in charge of making the schedule. For this reason, I choose not to get a part-time college job.

The Pay

- My most recent job was at the Hickory Hollow Mall in Antioch, and as if I wasn't punishing myself enough by working in a mall, I took a job at Hot Topic. Please don't laugh. I only worked there for about three weeks. Anyway, I had pretty much decided

this job wasn't going to work out because it was heavily structured around corporate policies and rules, as were the rest of the people working there. Then I got my first paycheck and learned I was making as much an hour as I did when I was 16-years-old-- \$5.15, \$5.15!! Isn't minimum wage higher than that? This doesn't only happen at Hot Topic, it's everywhere. It appalls me that corporations around the country get away with paying people what they do because they know they can get away with it. Hot Topic knows they can get away with it because it's one of the few places where people, who don't exactly look like a "Sears catalog cut out," can get a job, myself included. So I've decided the stress that goes along with these crappy jobs isn't worth \$5 or \$6 an hour.

The Stressed-Out Manager

- Why is it that every place I've worked at, while in college, has a manager who can't handle their job, which usually isn't hard at all? They freak out if some small corporate rule is broken. They freak out if you are two minutes late. They also freak out if it gets busy. I'm not saying it's ok to break rules and come to work late, but it is ok to deal with things on a level head.

One time I was waiting tables at a restaurant here in Murfreesboro, and we got a brief little rush at about 8 p.m. We happened to be out of pre-made salads, and all the servers were busy with their tables. My manager, instead of calmly delegating work, popped a few veins in his neck and started, um, "making salads." This consisted of him carelessly ripping a bag of lettuce open (which made it go everywhere, pissing him off even more), literally throwing glass salad bowls all over the kitchen and screaming that "things were going to change around here."

This made everyone else stress out too, making the predicament worse. I've experienced similar situations like this many times, with different managers in different places, and it always drives me crazy. So, to avoid being exposed to "the stressed-out manager," I don't have a crappy part-time job.

These are just a few of my reasons for not taking a part-time job right now. Many of you have to deal with all of this and more, and I sincerely commend you. Just because all you do at work is bring people food or sell them overpriced clothes, it doesn't mean it's always easy. ♦

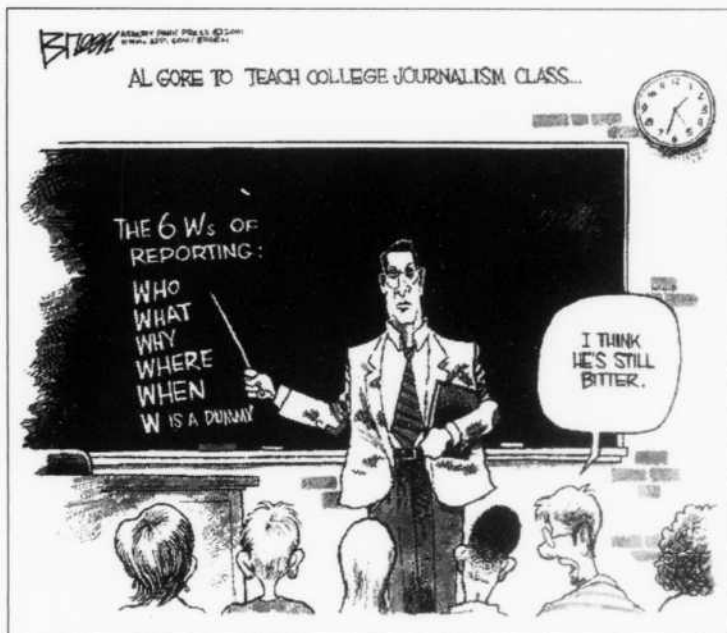
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slopinio@mtsu.edu



Letters to the Editor

Mail your comments to Box 42, drop them off at JUB 310 or e-mail them to stupubs@mtsu.edu. Letters may be edited for length, grammar or content.

Literary magazine encourages different perspectives

I am the editor of *Scribbling Mob*, and thought I should throw in my say.

First of all, there are 2.5 billion women on this planet. I don't think that anyone could seriously believe that we all think the same way. That would be ludicrous. It would be similarly ludicrous to insinuate there is a "right" and a "wrong" way to think. The fact that there are so many people on Earth leads me to believe it would be very boring if everyone thought the same way, or thought differently, but no one had the guts to express their opinions. We would be in a seriously sad shape if no one could express their thoughts or opinions without being labeled "perverted," "warped" or "in need of counseling." So could we try a little open-mindedness before diagnosing people we've never met?

Scribbling Mob is an egalitarian feminist magazine. I encourage everyone who is cringing right now at the word "feminist" to try focusing on the word "egalitarian." *Scribbling Mob* promotes the inherent equality of men and women. We accept submissions that have to do with feminism and women's issues, regardless of whether any one of us on the staff personally agrees with the expressed opinions.

I'm not going to apologize for any submissions printed in the last issue. They don't speak for me, and I'm certainly not going to speak for them. It's my personal belief, that if you think other ideas need to be

expressed, then you should submit those ideas until you feel the magazine is sufficiently well-rounded. But I don't think it's fair to verbally bash people for expressing ideas that are different from yours. After all, you're expressing ideas contrary to theirs.

Kati Hermsdorfer
Scribbling Mob, editor in chief

Serving it up - a conservative's response

In response to Angela White's latest piece (*Sidelines* 1-31-01), I'd like to "Serve Up" some of my responses.

1. You can trust conservatives. They are people. Can you trust all of them? The answer to this stupid question is definitely "No." The fact that you are unhappy with the actions of one, or even many, does not mean the millions of "conservatives" in the U.S. are the same as that one. So you don't like George W. Bush. Fine.

2. Hmmm, let's see. How many people really want their tax dollars going to fund abortions? Not me. I have a real problem with a system that promotes promiscuity. Abortions are legal. This I accept. I don't like it, but I accept it. However, I find it to be a gross misappropriation of government funding to give money to clinics that perform abortions. And by the way, if you don't want to get pregnant, don't have sex. (Wow, a 100% effective birth control method. How neat!)

3. You have a problem with the president being

immersed in his faith? That's confusing. Why, you ask? Because if the president does not acknowledge the existence and authority of God, what is to stop him from becoming the next Napoleon or even Hitler? Nothing. Bush's acknowledgment of God, and the adherence to the conviction in his heart, will be enough to help him resist the temptation humans have when they gain power. That temptation is to get more and more power until there is no one who would dare get in your way. His faith will not allow him to do that and this cases my mind.

4. You talk about the "fighters for women's rights." Guess what. You have them. There are laws "on the books" protecting women's rights. Some may think this a contradiction to the first point since the Supreme Court decided it is a woman's right to have an abortion. No contradiction here. The gag order set forth by the president does not make abortion illegal, just more expensive.

5. "Religion will undoubtedly play a huge role in this administration's tenure..." I find this to be a good thing.

6. "... (W)omen must fight to resist being morally governed by the religious right." If the women (and/or men) you are speaking about have morals and good character, why would they feel as if they are being "morally governed?"

You've given me much to rant about, more than is here, but I'll just store it away and serve this up as an appetizer.

Sean Lankford
Senior
Business Management

CAMPUS LIFE

6♦ SIDELINES

Thursday, February 8, 2001

Murfreesboro, TN

Blind musician proves he's 'Sharp'

By Jenny Cordle
Staff Writer

Just as a mechanic tinkers under a car — his fingers serving as his eyes—Nick Sharp's fingers trickle down the chords of the guitar without hesitation. The lights from the Cyber Café dance across his forehead as he moves with every flick of a chord.

Behind those eyes is someone who hasn't seen since birth. Someone who is guided only by light and the scraping of a cane on concrete.

The illumination of fluorescent lighting on his face lets him know he's right where he needs to be — in the spotlight at Open Mic Night on a Monday.

"Scars are souvenirs you never lose," sings Sharp.

His voice resembles John Rzeznik's, lead singer of the Goo Goo Dolls, more than he'll admit as he sings "Name" to a faceless crowd of students.

"Are y'all all right out there?" he asks the students for reassurance during an instrumental break in the song.

The students open their mouths to howl and lift their hands to clap.

Freshman Nick Sharp, tightening his grip, lets his fingers weave their way in and out of the chords, covering the hole in the base of the guitar as he sings the last few lyrics of "Name."

For the next minute, Nick will hear only the sounds of students praising his efforts with clapping and variations of "Woo!"

Kudos for eight years of practicing a skill Nick refers to as "hell."

"There were times I'd get so mad over the guitar. You know, just throw it down in the case and want to rip it to shreds," says Nick, laughing as he pretends to hold his imaginary guitar toward the ground.

Needless to say, his brown Ovation guitar, decorated with intricate leaf patterns, is still intact. Occasionally, Nick bangs its case against a table or door as he's trying to find his way through campus buildings, the closest it's ever come to being abused.

Within eight years, he's shared his guitar with crowds of as many as 5,000, including an unexpected debut at a Billy Ray Cyrus concert at eleven-years-old, playing at local clubs with Charlie Daniels, opening up for Tim McGraw and appearing on *The Regis and Kathie Lee Show*.

Although most of Nick's performances have focused on the country music industry, he writes "just about anything."

Freshman Jennifer Crick, a friend who's known Nick for three years, says, "Nick surprises me with something new every time he plays."

"He's a wonderful musician," she says, "but he's very modest about it."

"Some of the songs I have written are more country, others resemble blues and some are edgy and alternative," says Nick, a recording industry management major.

"I don't like to say, 'Oh, I'm going to write this type of music and sing this type of song,'" he continues. "You limit yourself when you do that."

For Nick, there are no limits.

Ever since that fateful day when he sat in on a guitar lesson for his sister Jamey, he's expanded his musical knowledge and talent from the beating of drums to the picking of chords despite his complete loss of sight.

Nick says drums were his first love, but he's not allowed to have a drum set in the dorm room because of the noise. That didn't stop him.

His roommate, freshman Andy Owen, laughs as he recalls that Nick "set up boxes in the room and he was using them as drums."

"He can listen to a song on the radio and play it by ear immediately, and almost never messes up," brags Andy, amazed by his talent.

"He's a remarkable musician and person," says Andy. "He refuses to be a statistic."

Refuses with abandon is more like it.

"There's a lot of blind people who sit on their butts and collect Social Security," Nick says, unsympathetically. "No one wants us to sit at home eating bonbons and watching



Photo by Jenny Cordle | Staff Photographer

Freshman Nick Sharp plays the guitar as he sings Goo Goo Dolls' "Name" at Open Mic Night.

Oprah. It's people like that who give people with disabilities a bad reputation."

Born three months prematurely, Nick spent the first few months of his life in an incubator.

"After four months in the hospital, the doctors told my parents, 'Oh, your son's gonna be crippled, your son's gonna be a vegetable,'" says Nick. "You may as well pull the plug."

He deepens his voice to imitate plans of a higher power. "Somehow, God was like, 'No, you've got a lot more purpose than to lie in some bed and have somebody change your diaper.'"

After doctors discovered Nick was ultimately blind, his parents began their "never ending mission to get my sight back come hell or high water."

But as a toddler, his parents had to face his disability when he noticed the sun setting through light perception as the light was going down from the sky. Light would be the only thing Nick would see for the rest of his life.

"As far as blindness bringing me down, I like being blind," he says in a serious manner. Laughter follows shortly behind.

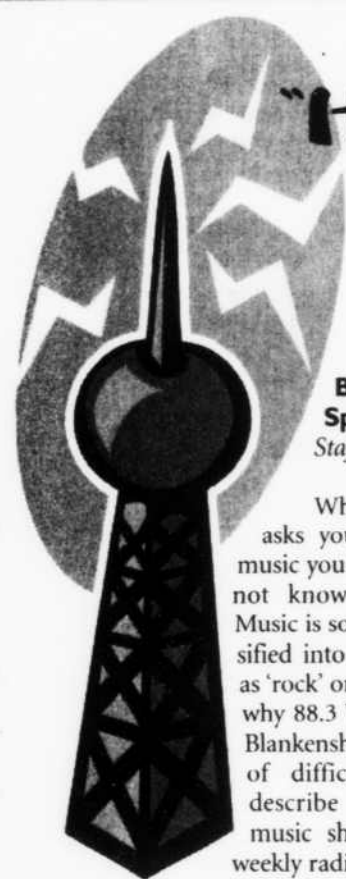
"I really do, aside from the fact that it's hard for a brother to get some wheels around here, you know."

He realizes his cane is the closest he's going to get to "wheels."

"It takes 15 minutes to get to class and this is a monster of a campus," explains Nick.

He spent three weeks during the summer, before his first semester, learning where all the buildings are with the help

See Sharp, 7



"It's just cool as shit"

Blankenship adds diversity to WMTS

By Brian
Spencer
Staff Writer

When someone asks you what kind of music you listen to, do you not know what to say? Music is so hard to be classified into one genre such as 'rock' or 'indie,' which is why 88.3 WMTS DJ Katie Blankenship has a little bit of difficulty trying to describe what kind of music she spins on her weekly radio show.

"Whenever people ask me what music I listen to, I just think it's such a silly question," says Blankenship. "I mean, I know what an 'indie' band sounds like, but I can't tell

you exactly what that means."

This is Katie's first year as a DJ, and she's still trying to work out all the kinks to make her show exactly what she has envisioned it to be.

While the whole two hours of her program, right now, focus on recorded music, she hopes to change the format soon to include one hour of music and one hour of interviews and live performances with bands from around the area.

In the meantime, every Saturday afternoon from 2 to 4 p.m., you can expect to hear some of the best and most diverse underground and indie rock around, if that's what you want to call it. On any given program you might hear bands such as Jeff Buckley, Granddaddy, The Pixies, Radiohead and Liz Phair. She also plays bands from the local area.

Blankenship, who majors in anthropology, grew up in Murfreesboro and is now in her second stint at a local radio station. When she was in high school, she worked at 1450 AM talk radio,

located near the square, and has been interested in becoming a part of WMTS since graduating from high school.

"I really started getting into the local music scene a few years ago," says Blankenship. "I thought it would be great to be involved in some way too."

"I get to spend two hours up in the radio booth by myself and just do whatever I want. It's just cool as shit."

In a short time at WMTS, Blankenship has made her mark as a DJ with diverse tastes and a wry sense of humor on the air. So the next time you're chillin' on a Saturday afternoon, don't forget to tune in and check out some music that transcends being thrown into one particular genre. ♦



ON CAMPUS

Compiled By Leslie Fike - Copy Editor

Thursday, Feb. 8

The MTSU Fencing Club teaches a beginning class on basketball court #6 in the Rec Center from 6 to 7 p.m. through May. For more information contact Stuart Bernstein at 898-5998.

The KUC Cube Gallery is exhibiting paintings and sculptures by Marta Slaughter through Feb. 9.

Monday, Feb. 12

The Red Cross Bloodmobile is at the Nursing Center from 1:15 to 5:15 p.m. Open to the public.

Tuesday, Feb. 27

The Placement and Student Employment Center hosts the Nashville Area College to Career Fair & Nashville Area Teacher Recruitment Fair, located off of Interstate Highway 24 at the Expo Center in Smyrna. The Career Fair is from noon to 5 p.m., and the Teacher Fair is from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The fair is open to MTSU juniors, seniors, graduate students and alumni.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH EVENTS

Thursday, Feb. 8

ESPN sports journalist Ralph Wiley speaks on "The Black Community in the New Millennium" in the BAS from 7 to 9 p.m.

Monday, February 12

A FREE forum on "Male/Female Relationships" is at KUC Room 322 at 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 14

Dr. Bruce Bridges speaks on "Martin Luther King: Perspective of the Past, Vision of the Future" in the JUB Tennessee Room at 5 p.m.

A Distinguished Black Alumni awards is held at the Alumni Center at 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 20

A session on the "Importance of Finishing High School and Going to College" is in the KUC at 8 a.m.

Dr. Adonijah Bakari speaks on "Reflections On a Sojourn to Nigeria" in Peck Hall Room 222 at 12:30 p.m.

Sharp: Musician has no limits despite disability

Continued from 6

of a sighted guide, provided by Disabled Student Services.

"Nick was one of those good students who learned quickly," explains John Harris, director of Disabled Student Services.

"Some are better than others and some are afraid of the task," he says, referring to the 35 visually impaired and blind students on campus. "But Nick was aggressive."

Nick didn't learn about MTSU's accommodating disability program until after he was accepted, but he describes it as "a plus."

Nick takes advantage of books on tape,

adaptive computer equipment and Braille Light, all provided by Disabled Student Services, who also hire readers and note-takers for individual students.

With as many as 800 students with disabilities, MTSU ranks second in the state for having the most disabled students.

"I would put our program up against any program in the South," says Harris. "Our technology puts us pretty well up there."

It's that technology that's going to help Nick get through his four years and work to get a Ph.D. "So I can show some validity about my work."

For now, Nick enjoys playing occasionally at the Cyber Cafe to keep up with his music.

As the last student claps, Nick begins another song with the help of Jennifer Crick, who sings with him sometimes.

He positions his fingers on the frets of the guitar and sings Lump Bizkit's "Break Stuff" in a mello voice. The students laugh at the sight of Nick singing such blunt lyrics, but Nick simply smiles, knowing he's pleased yet another crowd. ♦

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TERRY GROSS (4-5PM)

OVERNIGHTS WITH BOB PARLOCHA

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The Two Minute Drill

R. Colin Fly



Sports Editor

Jamie, won't you be my Valentine?

Junior Jamie Thomatis became the third player to repeat as Sun Belt Conference Player of the Week after helping lead the Lady Raiders to wins over Western Kentucky and Florida International, the two top teams in the conference, last week.

Thomatis exploded for 37 points against Western Kentucky, shooting a scorching 11 of 15 from the field Thursday. Saturday, she knocked down 20 more points, averaging 28.5 points for the two games.

The team's scoring leader shot 70 percent from the floor, 80 percent from three-point range and hit 88 percent of her free-throws, while averaging 8.5 rebounds and 4.5 assists for the week.

Thomatis became the first player ever to earn player of the week honors from Middle Tennessee in their first season of play in the Sun Belt on Dec. 18.

She joins Florida International's Gergana Slavtcheva and Michaela Pavlickova as the only players to win the award at least twice this season. Slavtcheva has won it three times.

Movin' on up

The Blue Raiders' tennis team may be moving to a deluxe apartment in the sky.

They jumped up six places this week in the International Tennis Association National Rankings on Wednesday, from 46th to 40th. The ranking is the highest since the 1998 preseason ranking, which had MT in the Top 25.

Coach Dale Short said that this team has the potential to reach the Top 25.

Middle Tennessee has risen 17 places in the last two weeks after initially beginning the season in 57th place.

The Blue Raiders have beaten four straight ranked opponents and will face off against No. 27 Indiana State today and play SEC powers Alabama, ranked 49th in the country, and Ole Miss, ranked 10th in the country, this weekend.

The Lady Raiders fell two slots this week to No. 71. Their road also won't get any easier as they spend the weekend in the Palmetto State. They will battle against the South Carolina Gamecocks and the Clemson Tigers, ranked 19th and the 26th, respectively.

Good to be home

Head coach Andy McCollum expressed his joy to be home following three straight months of recruiting.

He gave special thanks to his wife, Gwen and children, Andrea and Drew, during the press conference Wednesday. ♦

Do you need your sports event in The Two Minute Drill? Got a good sports tip or even a favorite Chinese restaurant that you'd recommend? Call the Sports Desk at 898-2816 or e-mail us at slsports@mtsu.edu with all the pertinent information.

Raiders seek Top 20, avoid injuries

By Adam Sparks
Staff Writer

The Middle Tennessee State men's tennis team limped into this season plagued with injuries, but brought with them hopes of a Sun Belt title and national tournament birth.

With two of their most accomplished athletes and a promising newcomer recovering from surgeries, the men's tennis team started the 2001 schedule less than 100 percent.

Sophomore Daniel Klemetz and junior Oliver Foreman suffered wrist and elbow injuries, respectively, and freshman Trevor Short is recovering from his fourth knee surgery.

All three, however, continue to compete in MTSU matches.

Despite playing at partial strength, the MTSU men's team has defended their 57th national ranking with impressive showings against Arkansas-Little Rock, Louisville, and Kansas — all nationally ranked opponents.

According to sophomore Klemetz, the team has had to fight through the pain in order to win so far in this young season.

"We've had some tough matches, and the reason we've won them is that we've fought really hard," Klemetz said. "Most of our matches have been real dog fights."

Although early season injuries have slowed the team, a healthy Blue Raider squad could have the potential to be one of the best in recent school history, according to MTSU men's tennis head coach Dale Short.

"It's a little early to put a strong foothold on [a goal for the team] because of injuries, but it's been a realistic goal in my mind that we can finish in the top 20 in the nation," coach Short said.



Junior Mark Pellerin returns a serve during a fall invitational match. Pellerin is one of six foreign born players.

The MTSU men's team returns seven of nine members from the Ohio Valley Conference champion squad of 2000 and features three athletes invited to the 2001 National Collegiate Athletic Association Indoor Championship — Klemetz, Foreman, and Robert Gustafsson.

Klemetz, the 2000 Southern Intercollegiate (1st flight) champion, recently became the highest ranked sophomore in MTSU tennis history at 10th in the nation.

Foreman and Gustafsson, both juniors, will compete in

the indoor national tournament as doubles partners.

Returning team captain Mark Pellerin and senior Belal Hamadeh will bring experience to the team, while sophomore Sean Bowen will add depth.

Freshmen Kirk Jackson, Michael Staniak, and Trevor Short already have shown promise in their first season.

Short, along with Pellerin, won the 2000 Middle Tennessee Fall Invitational doubles tournament. Staniak captured the Southern Intercollegiate (2nd flight) title, while Jackson has won numerous close matches in

the young spring season.

According to coach Short, the Blue Raider tennis team is one of the favorites to win the 2001 Sun Belt title.

To win the conference, though, MTSU must beat nationally ranked Sun Belt contenders South Alabama, Louisiana-Lafayette and New Mexico State.

With this challenging schedule ahead, coach Short is still optimistic about his team's future.

"If we can stay healthy and we can stay focused and we can continue to grow, I think this

team could do some things that would rival what we did a few years ago when we reached a No. 4 ranking in the country," coach Short said.

The MTSU men's tennis team will face Purdue Feb. 4 and Indiana State Feb. 8. Both matches will be played at the Racquet Club in Murfreesboro.

The 2000-2001 Sun Belt Tennis Championship will be held April 20-22. Athens, Georgia will host the NCAA Tennis Championships May 19-27. ♦

ASU comes calling to MT

By Colleen Cox
Staff Writer


Photo by Kristy Dalrymple | Staff

Joanne Aluka scores two against UNO. Aluka is part of a strong inside attack led by Jamie Thomatis.

The Lady Raiders hit the hardwood Saturday night looking for another Sun Belt win.

The Lady Raiders' competition comes in the form of Arkansas State University. ASU is riding a three game winning streak. Monday night the Lady Indians defeated Louisiana-Lafayette to pull into a tie for third place in the Eastern Division of the Sun Belt.

Meanwhile, the Lady Raiders are on their own three game winning streak. Middle handled the number two (Florida International) and number three (Western Kentucky) teams in the Eastern Division this past week.

"It's really amazing how much confidence makes a difference in your play," Lady Raider head coach Stephany Smith said after Saturday's game. "We are getting national exposure and giving ourselves a chance to be playing after the Sun Belt tournament is over."

Junior forward Jamie Thomatis comes into this game on a hot streak. She was named Sun Belt Conference Player of the Week. Against Western Kentucky, Thomatis scored 37 points. She put up 20 points against Florida International.

Thomatis isn't the only Lady Raider who is hot. Sophomore Paula Pentilla scored a career-high 20 points including five three-pointers against FIU.

Senior guard Keisha Evans has had the hot hand as of late for ASU. She has led the Lady Indians in scoring the past two games with 17 and 15 points respectively.

The Lady Raiders and Lady Indians met January 4 in Jonesboro. Arkansas State won that game 85-63. The Lady Indians out shot and out rebounded the Lady Raiders while forcing them into 25 turnovers.

This time the Lady Raiders look to take advantage of momentum and rest. Middle has had this week to rest. Arkansas State on the other hand played Monday and sees action again tonight.

"This is a good time for this team to get a break," Smith said after Saturday's game.

On paper the Lady Raiders look to have the advantage. The Lady Indians are shooting just over 40 percent and scoring 69 points per game. The Lady Raiders are shooting 46 percent while averaging 74.5 points per game.

The Lady Raiders and Lady Indians will battle on the hardwood of Murphy Center Saturday night at 7:00 p.m. ♦

Raiders must use 'Gunn's at ASU

By Nick Hefley
Staff Writer

Middle Tennessee will try to avenge a loss on Jan. 4 against Arkansas State on Saturday. In the first meeting, ASU scored 42 first half points en route to their eventual defeat of the Blue Raiders, 73-61 at the Murphy Center.

The Blue Raiders come into the game having lost their last nine in a row. ASU has won their last two and nine of their last 11.

Arkansas State is currently 1.5 games outside of first, behind Western Kentucky in the East Division.

Middle Tennessee is in last place with the worst record in the division, 1-10.

MT is 5-16 overall and is second worst behind North Texas and Florida International, who both stand at 4-17.

Middle Tennessee has been getting great play lately out of Tommy Gunn, who is averaging almost 9 points per contest. Also, senior Freddie Martinez kicked it up in the last game

See Raiders, 3

THURSDAY

■ **Women's Tennis**
Lady Raiders at South Carolina
Columbia, S.C., 2 p.m.

■ **Men's Tennis**
Blue Raiders vs. Indiana St.
Murfreesboro, Tenn., 2 p.m.

SATURDAY

■ **Women's Basketball**
Lady Raiders vs. Arkansas St.
Murfreesboro, Tenn., 7 p.m.

■ **Men's Basketball**
Blue Raiders at Arkansas St.
Jonesboro, Ark., TBA

SUNDAY

■ **Women's Tennis**
Lady Raiders at Furman
Greenville, S.C., 10 a.m.

■ **Men's Tennis**
Blue Raiders at Mississippi
Oxford, Miss., 1 p.m.

MONDAY

■ **Golf**
Beau Rivage Classic
Gulfport, Miss., All day

TUESDAY

■ **Golf**
Beau Rivage Classic
Gulfport, Miss., All day

Recruits: McCollum announces new signees to media, alumni and Blue Raider fans

Continued from 12

how proud he was that these players have grown up and become men.

"I'm looking forward to just getting out on the field and playing," said Grant. "As far as class is concerned, I'm taking care of that."

Rashard Lee — who McCollum says "was recruited by every school in America" — was regarded as the best athlete in Georgia coming out of high school in 1999. But Lee, who runs a 4.3 in the 40-yard dash, understands that the running back position is very deep.

"We're all equal players, and we'll all play an equal role," said Lee. "I know we'll all give 100 percent."

The 6-foot-4, 285-pound Johnson says he plans to "make a big difference" as well.

Three of the mid-term signees are expected to fill the huge void in the offensive line left by five graduating seniors.

"After graduating five offensive linemen a year ago,

[recruiting offensive linemen] had to be a need," McCollum said. "We had to go out and get some older help."

Nate Blasi, Bill Brasch and Preston Portley are definitely older. All three come from successful junior college programs and contain experience desperately needed.

The 6-foot-2, 285-pound Blasi is expected to step in immediately and fill the void left at center by graduating Brock Lillis. Blasi was a JuCo All-American in his second year at Butler County Community College in Wichita Kansas. Blasi was recruited by Louisiana Tech, Marshall, Minnesota, New Mexico State and Alabama at Birmingham, but was impressed with McCollum and his staff.

"It all came down to the coaching staff," Blasi said of his reason for choosing Middle.

Portley (6-foot-4, 336 pounds) and Brasch (6-foot-4, 300 pounds) are expected to compete for playing time as well.

"We may have recruited more ability than we possibly had a year ago," said McCollum. "But at the same time, how fast they grow together and how close they become is going to be a big reason for our success."

McCollum was able to add six in-state players to the Blue Raider family. None two were bigger, however, than Murfreesboro native Brett Trott and Alvin Fite, Mr. Football for Class 4A from Nashville.

Trott, from Oakland High, had originally committed to Michigan before his senior year as a Patriot. But McCollum says he stayed after him, visiting every member of his family, trying to persuade him to stay at home.

"I don't think you can be more proud than to have your own," McCollum said. "We just raised the attendance up by 50 I know."

Fite, a Hillsboro graduate, verbally committed to McCollum early, but faced heavy recruiting from SEC powers Alabama and Arkansas

before staying true to his commitment.

"He made a commitment and stuck by his commitment," McCollum said.

McCollum regards Trott and Fite as "two of the best players in the state, maybe in the South."

Two of the more highly touted recruits, however, didn't commit until Wednesday morning. Quan Domineck and Titus Peebles were the two biggest surprises of the day.

"I think Quan knew he was coming," said McCollum.

"He kept us awake all night, (but) we'll take care of that later," McCollum said in a joking manner.

Domineck is rated as the No. 4 Tight End in the nation by Rivals.com. After committing to Georgia early, rumor had it that he would move to defensive end.

"He wants to be a receiving tight end," said McCollum. "And that's a dimension of our offense that we haven't really had."

Peebles is rated as the No. 1 defensive player in Georgia, and has speed that is second-to-none at the (defensive) end position.

The theme of family and supporting each other echoed throughout the 45-minute-long speech from McCollum.

"We have a team that believes right now," McCollum said.

And that belief will steer the Blue Raiders in 2001.

"The more success we have, the more success Middle Tennessee benefits, and the more success we do in this state."

"All we've got is each other, within departments, within universities, within the system, the state and everywhere else, and that's what Middle Tennessee is all about. That's why we're going to be atop of the country one day - I really believe that." ♦

Raiders:

Continued from 8

against Florida International with 16 points.

ASU heads into the match with 4 players averaging double digits. Jason Jennings is averaging 13.8 points and 6.8 rebounds per contest. Three-point specialist Jamie Rosser, who has hit 41 of 89 attempts (46.1 percent), is averaging 11.3 points. Nick Rivers and Kolin Weaver are contributing 12.1 and 11.8 a game.

Basically, the Blue Raiders cannot concentrate on one player like they did in the Western Kentucky game with Chris Marcus.

They will have to play strong team defense if they have any hopes of ending this long losing streak or else they could be looking at a losing streak that extends into next season. ♦

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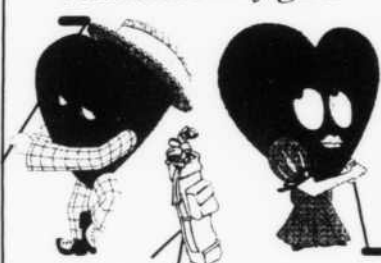
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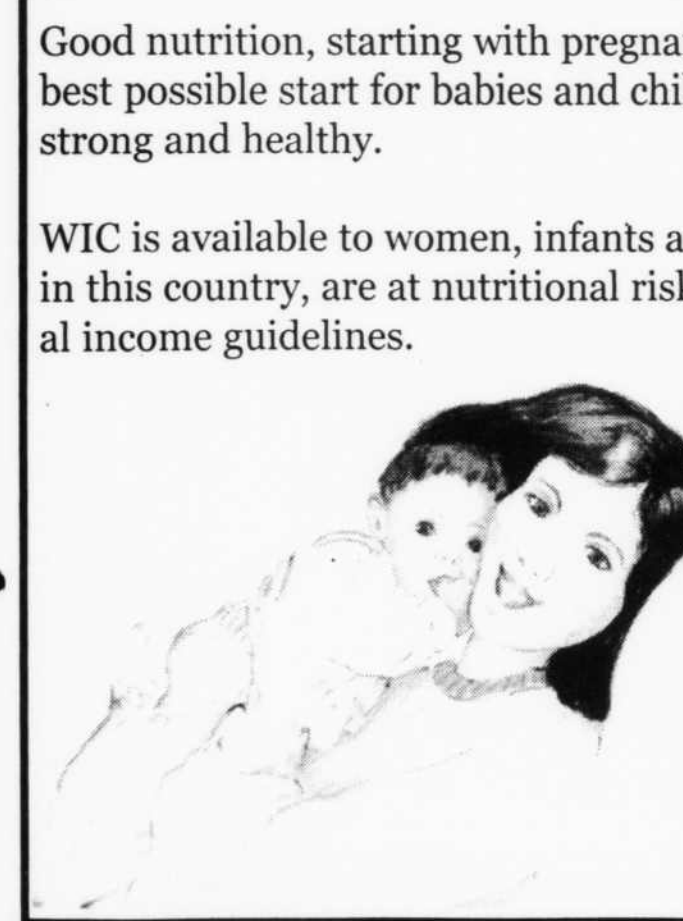
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SIGNING DAY EXCLUSIVE

12 ♦ SIDELINES

Thursday, February 8, 2001

Murfreesboro, TN

By J.P. Plant
& R. Colin Fly
Assistant Sports Editor
& Sports Editor

Family and a united community were the sentiments of Blue Raider head football coach Andy McCollum at the National Signing Day press conference held in the Floyd Stadium Gameday Room Wednesday.

Thirty-one new members of the Middle Tennessee family were introduced in front of an optimistic crowd of media and fans numbering more than 100.

McCollum started the press conference by thanking several members of the university and his staff in the athletic department. One member of the university, in particular, was Interim President R. Eugene Smith.

"Since he's come, he has done a tremendous job for us and has been so supportive," McCollum said of Smith.

Having been on the road recruiting for nearly three months straight, McCollum appeared relieved somewhat that this part of the year was over, yet emphasized that there is plenty of work to be done.

Getting a head start on the incoming recruiting class were seven players consisting of four mid-term signees and four students under proposition 48: Julius Grant, Thomas Johnson, Rashard Lee and Kerry Wright. These four sophomores are products of a program that allows student athletes who met one of only two criterion required to participate in NCAA athletics, to receive scholarships dependent on their qualification the following year.

"Our players aren't perfect and are going to make mistakes, but they're ours," McCollum said regarding the four sophomores.

McCollum said repeatedly

See Recruits, 9

For a Full List of Recruits,
See page 10



Mid-term signees (clockwise from top left) Preston Portley, Bill Brasch, Nate Blasi and Shawn Allen are four of 31 Blue Raider recruits seeking to fill starting roles in the upcoming season. The question is, who else will step up and fill the void of 21 seniors that graduated from last year's squad?

Graphic by Carey Coker | Sports Designer



Photo by R. Colin Fly | Staff

Nate Blasi, Preston Portley, Bill Brasch, Kerry Wright, Rashard Lee, Thomas Jones and Julius Grant are introduced to the media, alumni and fans by head coach Andy McCollum during Middle Tennessee's National Signing Day Press Conference Wednesday.

View from the Top



Michael Edwards

Contrary to popular belief, the king is not dead. He is alive in the form of MTSU head football coach Andy McCollum.

As I sat in the MTSU Gameday Room in Floyd Stadium, I couldn't help but feel the electricity that filled the room, prior to the comments delivered by McCollum. Around 100 people were on hand, in anticipation of what just might be the greatest recruiting class in Middle Tennessee football history.

The Blue Raider staff began the quest to become a I-A football program with their first recruiting class in 1999, which was promptly dubbed the greatest class in school history. Then the 2000 class was the greatest, and now, the 2001 class is the greatest.

I'm sensing a trend here.

He just keeps plugging away.

Competing against the most reputable football programs in all of the land, McCollum keeps pulling the rabbit out of the hat. With the likes of Michigan and Tennessee looking on, the Blue Raiders snagged a great offensive lineman from Murfreesboro.

During last year's press conference, McCollum told the room he knew his staff had to secure Murfreesboro, well, this year he stuck to it.

From the Murfreesboro area come some of the best football players in the state. Take for example, Jacksonville Jaguar cornerback, Fernando Bryant, or University of Tennessee defensive back, Eric Locke.

Murfreesboro produces the talent, McCollum has figured out how to bring it to Middle Tennessee State.

Last season, McCollum went out on a limb with some players who were not eligible to play

during their freshman season in college.

After most schools bailed out, McCollum and his believers stayed with them, and now MTSU is the recipient of several of the finest football players in America.

Knowing the offensive line was severely depleted after the departure of four starters, McCollum hit the warpath looking for size.

Three offensive linemen have been on campus since January. Nate Blasi (6-2, 275), Preston Portley (6-4, 336) and Bill Brasch (6-4, 300) will have an excellent opportunity to see playing time right away.

The offensive line will have the potential to be as physical as anyone other line out there.

The staff didn't just sign linemen, they signed some of the biggest linemen they could find.

Portley will have some competition to see which player can go through the buffet line the most.

Joining him will be Jarian Stokes (6-8 320) and Brandon Parker (6-7, 335). The Raiders did not sign an offensive lineman weighing less than 275 pounds, and the smallest is the center.

Andy McCollum, in his third year working with football secretary Jan Worley, has become an icon.

In fact, if he ran for Mayor of Murfreesboro, he would win. If he promised no state income tax, he could when the governor's office.

Here's a guy, who recruited and signed a player just because his name was "Cha-Cha."

Now, that's confidence.

Since McCollum has been at Middle Tennessee, the press conferences have gone from having one microphone on the podium to having three, not to mention being covered live by WGNS radio.

No, they aren't ESPN, but it is a start.

Anyway, the next time you hear someone say the King is dead, say, "No, he coaches MTSU football." ♦

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