

Charismanic

BY CHARLES E. REINHOLD / PHOTOS BY ROB HILL

COACH QUIN SNYDER HAS THE CHARM, THE LOOKS, THE ENERGY AND THE BIGGER-THAN-LIFE

ABILITY TO MAKE IT ANYWHERE FROM BUSINESS TO LAW TO BASKETBALL.

WHAT WILL HE DO IN HIS FIRST SEASON AT MU?

HE'S GOT A LOT ON HIS MIND. The wedding. The move from Durham. The new coaching staff. The high-school heroes he'd like to bring to Columbia. The Tiger faithful for whom he's become the embodiment of hope eternal.

Near the end of a late-summer conversation, Quin Snyder, MU's first new head basketball coach in more than 30 years, leans across an uncluttered desk. "I'll tell you something," Snyder says. "It's been hard for me to keep talking about this stuff. I'm done talking about it."

He swivels toward a near-empty bookshelf. He pokes distractedly at a laptop computer. He glances out at his secretary. He's been talking for more than an hour, words bouncing off the walls like overinflated game balls. But he's not finished. He's simply talking about being tired of talking: "I'm still talking about what I'm going to do all the time. And it starts to sound hollow to me. That's not to take away from my excitement or enthusiasm, but I'm tired of talking about it. I want to go do it."

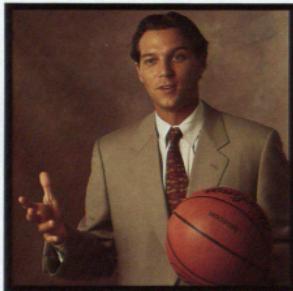
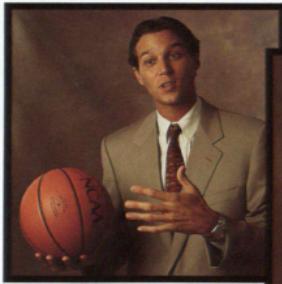
Snyder gets his wish Nov. 12. Following two club-team warm-ups, that's the day his Tigers open their season against the Wisconsin Badgers in Syracuse, N.Y.

Last season MU used its nonconference schedule to feast on weaker programs. But this fall, with three starters no longer on the court—and the addition of powerhouses Kentucky, Indiana and Iowa to the schedule—the Tigers' six-week Big 12 tuneup could end up far less festive.

"When CBS SportsLine lists us as the 11th-ranked team in the country, I think, well, that's probably setting expectations, at least in my analysis of what we have, too high," Snyder says.

Nevertheless, the Tigers boast a cornucopia of quickness, versatility and athleticism—all traits suited to the up-tempo style Snyder touted during his inaugural press conference last April. And Mizzou's 33-year-old head coach also had a great summer doing what he perhaps does better than any other coach in the nation: recruiting top players.





Snyder's signings include three highly sought-after athletes with immediate-impact potential. Six-foot-6-inch forward Kareem Rush, last season's Missouri Player of the Year, is tops among them. In four years as a starter, Rush helped lead his Kansas City high school to three straight state championships. He's a proven gunner, having averaged 27.8 points per game as a senior, who can rebound and run the floor.

He'll be joined by Columbia's Josh Kroenke, the Rock Bridge High standout who will add size, he's 6-foot-4, and three-point scoring punch to the Tigers' already exemplary backcourt of Keyon Dooling, Brian Grawer and Clarence Gilbert. New, too, is 240-pound Nigerian forward Tajudeen Soyoye, a 6-foot-9-inch tough guy who'll help shore up Mizzou's less impressive inside game.

Still, Snyder remains cautious.

"I don't have a good enough idea right now to even take a shot at how many games we're going to win. I haven't seen this team play," he says. "We're going to be small. So there's a challenge there. But I'd rather think about the fact that we could be quick. And maybe we can pressure people and run the ball up the floor. I think we can shoot the ball, too. But those are all things that make for good pre-season publications, that don't really . . . Look, if I'm thinking about all that stuff and not thinking about coaching my players and ways to make them better, then my time is probably not well-spent."

Quin Snyder knows a lot about time well-spent. A native of bucolic Mercer Island, Wash., he has always been driven to succeed. His dad, a high-school baseball coach, and his mom, herself an athlete, each encouraged the headstrong Quin to play every sport that struck his fancy.

That was plenty. Football, baseball, basketball—Quin was a schoolyard sensation in each. Athletic mastery bred confidence and, of course, competitiveness.

"If I hadn't lost my recess by getting in trouble for something, I liked to go out and play kickball and do all that stuff," he recalls. "I was fairly independent, bordering on disruptive. But school was always something that was important to me, and I was competitive there as well."

By the time he reached 10th grade at Mercer Island High School, Snyder had narrowed his focus to two things: basketball and academics. He excelled in both. In four years of high school he received exactly one mark that was short of perfect. Snyder also was near perfect in the gym. Twice he was voted state player of the year, leading Mercer Island to the state's Quad A basketball title in 1985. As a senior Snyder was named a McDonald's High School All-American, the first ever from Washington.

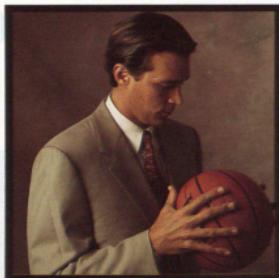
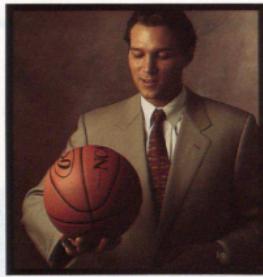
"He could do anything he put his mind to, whether it was being a lawyer, a head coach or president of the United States," his coach Ed Pepple told *The Kansas*

City Star. "He embodies everything about basketball and life you'd want young people to emulate."

For his part, Snyder downplays his high-school heroics, preferring to talk instead about what he learned from Pepple and his former teammates: "I got a great lesson early on in life about how rewarding it is to be a part of a group. And how rewarding it is to give yourself to a group, to achieve things with other people and to be able to share them," he says.

At graduation time, recruiters blanketed Mercer Island like fog in late spring. They needn't have bothered. Only Duke University had the mix of academic excellence and basketball dominance that young Quin was after, and Snyder became a Blue Devil with hardly a second thought.

Breaking into one of the nation's most storied basketball programs would be a daunting task for even the most polished high-school phenom, yet Snyder managed with characteristic aplomb, quickly establishing himself as an athletic—and academic—superstar. Two ACC championships; three Final Four appearances; team co-captain in 1988-89; GTE Academic All-American; a bachelor's degree in public policy; a master's degree in business administration; a law degree. The list of achievements seems almost superhuman. "I guess I was hungry," he says. "If I did something, I approached it with a certain amount of vigor. I just had a fair amount of pride in my performance



in various situations."

Hungry and, in fact, all too human. Snyder pursued graduate degrees in large part because he had no idea what to do with his life. He also says that, for a time, there was nothing he would rather have done less than play or coach basketball.

The crises came soon after Duke awarded him a bachelor's degree. "I was emotionally drained. I just did not want to play anymore," Snyder recalls. Nevertheless, at the urging of his father and Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski, Snyder signed a contract with the Indiana Pacers and embarked half-heartedly on an NBA career. Early in the morning following his first day of camp—a day in which Snyder says he played great basketball—he picked up the phone and made a call to his friend George Irvine, then the Pacers' director of player personnel.

"I called George at 1:30 a.m.—he lived there in town—and I said, 'You've got to come get me, I don't want to do this anymore,'" Snyder says. At that moment he was sure he was finished with competitive basketball.

Back in Durham, Snyder immersed himself in Duke's law and business schools. The move allowed him, for almost the first time since childhood, a measure of anonymity.

"It was very hard to have been the type of basketball star Quin was at Duke and then go on to graduate school," says Jerome Culp Jr., a Duke law professor

whom Snyder credits with easing him into the intellectual rigors of first-year law. "He's never been happy in the celebrity role.

He's good at it, very well-spoken and poised. But one of the things I think law school did was to help him prepare for becoming a more public person."

It also allowed him the freedom to rekindle his love for basketball. He played pickup games with his friends. He pitched in at Blue Devil practices. He even spent a year as an assistant coach to his former father-in-law, Larry Brown of the L.A. Clippers. Snyder's Sept. 25 marriage to Helen Redwine is his second.

John Hammond, now the Tigers' associate head basketball coach, was part of Brown's staff in Los Angeles when Snyder came on board. He says the impression Quin made was immediate and lasting. Hammond spent 10 years coaching in the NBA, the most recent six of them with the Detroit Pistons. He proudly counts superstars Joe Dumars and Grant Hill as among those players who have benefited from his hard work. Hammond nonetheless adopts an awestruck tone when describing the youth and energy of his new boss: "You're talking about a guy who is 33 years old, has a law degree and is an NCAA Division I coach at one of the best college programs in the country. That is not normal. This guy is not normal!"

Normal or not, it was another disappointment, this time the rejection of an application for a prestigious postgraduate business fellowship, that pushed Snyder

back into basketball once and for all.

"I wrote a bunch of essays and did presentations and interviews, and I got, basically, to the final round [of the fellowship competition]," Snyder says. "Then I got a letter that said, 'You don't get it.' "

That rejection may have been the most fortuitous bit of bad news in Missouri basketball history. Reading the letter, Snyder realized that all the qualities he hoped to bring to entrepreneurial activities—intelligence, drive, competitiveness—were exactly the attributes he had spent years honing on the hardwood.

"I had stayed involved with coaching a bit, but at that point I decided to jump in with both feet," he says. "I wrote about 300 letters to people all over the country asking if they had any openings, and was fortunate they had one at Duke."

And four years later, one at MU. Was there any hesitation about replacing Mr. Missouri Basketball?

"I feel honored to have a chance to pick up the baton," Snyder says. "It's been Norm Stewart's program; I think in many ways it will always be Norm Stewart's program. That's great with me. That's recognition of all the work that he did over the years, and I will benefit from his hard work. I hope he feels that way, too. Hopefully we will have some success, and he can look back and say, 'You know what? I gave these guys their start.' "

Snyder leans back, his big hands at rest on the arms of the chair. For the first time all afternoon he seems completely at ease. *