

Who's the man?

Fans ask this question and look for a Tiger star. Coach Quin Snyder looks for something different.

Story by Chris Blöse

In press conferences before the 2005–06 basketball season, Coach Quin Snyder seemed to have a lot on his mind, including job security. But standing out among most of his comments was one clear theme: team.

Showing either a quirky sense of humor or a secret love for Saturday morning cartoons, Snyder likened last year's team — his first to have a losing season and his second to miss March Madness — to a group of guys trying to be Mighty Mouse. Maybe that is a reference to wild and inefficient shooting (team average of roughly 41 percent), particularly from 3-point range (about 31 percent).

Individual players were emulating Mighty Mouse's theme, "Here I come to save the day," instead of making smart passes and taking high-percentage shots.

"What we need are the Superfriends," Snyder says, referring to the cartoon heroes who band together to fight the forces of evil.

For 2005–06, the 100th anniversary for Mizzou basketball, Snyder wants his players to band together to fight the forces of the Big 12. If you ask him, "Who's the man?" he'll likely stay on point and tell you that maybe there shouldn't be just one.

A trio of leaders

Even with a team focus, though, standouts must lead the way. Even the Superfriends had Superman.

Had Linas Kleiza not left Mizzou for the NBA, he clearly would have been donning the cape. In his absence, Snyder promotes a trio that he hopes will save the day — collectively, of course.

"Nobody's looked as good in practice as Jimmy McKinney," he says, "and right with him is Thomas Gardner, and right with them inside is Kevin Young."

Senior guard McKinney and junior guard Gardner are the team's top returning statistical leaders. McKinney, a first-team Academic All-Big 12 player, ranked fourth in scoring in 2004–05 with 7.2 points per game. Gardner, at times inconsistent but usually

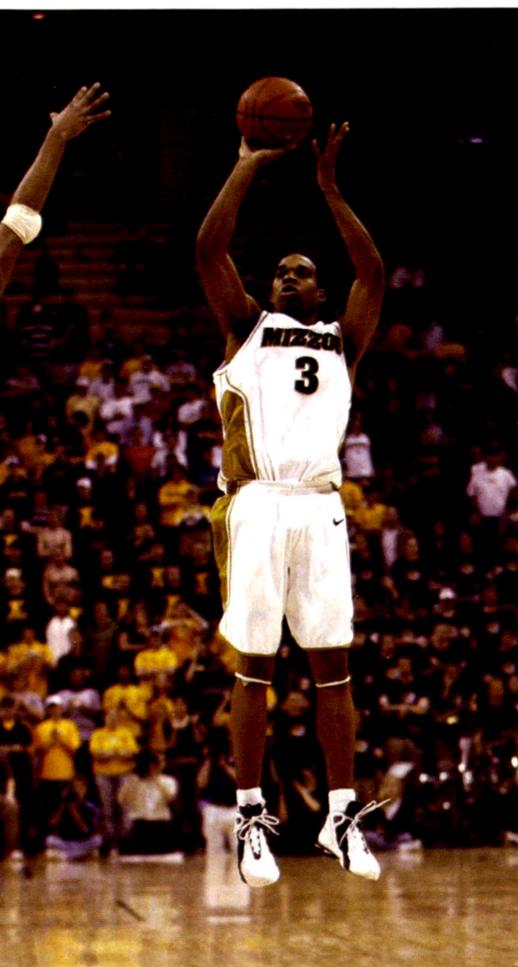
Thomas Gardner, Mizzou's off-the-bench warrior, is the top returning scorer with 10.4 points per game. One of the team's emotional forces, Gardner hopes to improve on his 36 percent shooting average.

an emotional leader on the court, ranked behind only Kleiza with 10.4 points per game even though he started less than half the time. Whereas Gardner probably needs to settle down a bit on court to have his best performance, Snyder would like to see the opposite out of McKinney: "Just let it rip. Who cares? You've got nothing to lose."

Kevin Young, the team's only other senior, will need to have more of an inside presence in Kleiza's absence. Young ranked second in rebounds last season with 4.9, and Snyder sees him as one of the team's more solid, consistent players. He needs the most improvement in scoring (4.8 points per game). Young likely never will be a leading scorer, but Snyder wants him to focus on shot placement and not miss the easy ones inside.

Also crucial will be the play of sophomore Jason Horton, the likely starter at point guard. When Spencer Laurie (who has since transferred) was injured early last season, Horton took the pressure of running Mizzou's offense without a true backup. The problem: Fatigue often led to sloppy play, errant passes and turnovers. Snyder and crew are trying to fix that problem with increased conditioning in the off-season.

Fans wait to see if other returning players can live up to their potential, as well. Sophomore forward Marshall Brown, maybe the most athletic player on the team and one with highlight-reel moves, will need to provide a driving threat from the perimeter but also inside. So will sophomore Kalen Grimes, who was unable to practice in the preseason because of injury.





Photos courtesy of Intercollegiate Athletics Media Relations

Coach Quin Snyder looks to seniors Jimmy McKinney, above, and Kevin Young for leadership and more consistent play this season. McKinney had Mizzou's fourth-best scoring average last season.

Recruiting from home

Even with NCAA-enforced restrictions on off-campus recruiting, Snyder and staff have attracted players that could fill holes on the team.

For example, the Tigers will have more depth at point guard (and guard positions in general) with the addition of junior James Douglas, who transfers from Schoolcraft Community College in Detroit. Inside, freshman Leo Lyons (formerly Leo Criswell) comes in as Mizzou's tallest player at 6 feet 9 inches. Numerous ranking systems place him among the nation's top 100 recruits, including placement as the No. 26 power

forward nationally by Rivals.com.

As for whether these new players and the rest of the team will congeal into the solid unit Snyder hopes for, he takes a typical wait-and-see approach: "We'll be as deep as our guys are good. If you can't play 10 minutes without giving up lay-ups or making turnovers, then you can't play 10 minutes."

To have a good season, the Tigers need less sloppy play and an improvement on last year's 14.4 turnovers per game. Another issue will be the team's size. Using a football metaphor, Snyder recognizes that his team isn't likely to "hold the line of scrimmage,"

Schedule

Date	Opponent
Wed 11/02/05	Bemidji St (exhibition)
Tue 11/08/05	Missouri Southern (exhibition)
Mon 11/14/05	Sam Houston State
Wed 11/16/05	Princeton / Drexel (tentative)
Sun 11/20/05	Northwestern State
Wed 11/23/05	Preseason NIT Semifinals
Fri 11/25/05	Preseason NIT Finals/Consolation
Tue 11/29/05	UMKC
Fri 12/02/05	Arkansas
Wed 12/07/05	Davidson
Sat 12/10/05	Texas A&M-Corpus Christ
Sun 12/18/05	Furman
Wed 12/21/05	Illinois (in St. Louis)
Wed 12/28/05	Eastern Illinois
Fri 12/30/05	Oakland
Mon 01/02/06	Louisiana-Monroe
Sat 01/07/06	Oklahoma State
Tue 01/10/06	Oklahoma
Sat 01/14/06	Colorado
Mon 01/16/06	Kansas
Sat 01/21/06	Kansas State
Wed 01/25/06	Iowa State
Sat 01/28/06	Nebraska
Wed 02/01/06	Texas
Sat 02/04/06	Texas Tech
Tue 02/07/06	Baylor
Sun 02/12/06	Kansas State
Sat 02/18/06	Kansas
Tue 02/21/06	Texas A&M
Sat 02/25/06	Colorado
Tue 02/28/06	Iowa State
Sun 03/05/06	Nebraska

Home games

so they need to make up for their lack of physical dominance with more spaced-out offensive schemes, better passes and plenty of movement.

More than anything, Snyder reiterates, he needs to help train his players to rejoice in team success rather than individual glory. To do so is to create better passes, higher-percentage shots and all the other things necessary to win.

"We had a team that looked at box scores," Snyder says of the past. He'd prefer a team that looks at the win column.

More, including a complete roster, game times and television coverage: mutigers.com ■