

TIGER BASKETBALL 2009-10

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mizzou basketball preview • professors of hoops • where is TJ Soyoye?



PAINT, NYLON AND STEEL ▲

Senior guard J.T. Tiller's relentless intensity leads a new crew of blue collar Tigers into the 2009-10 basketball season.

Photo by Dan Sullivan



Hoople

Result

Tiger basketball team explores possibilities for the 2009-10 season

Story by Marcus Wilkins | Photos by Rob Hill

Missouri Coach Mike Anderson is an even-tempered gentleman — when he's not courtside bellowing at his players, that is. His personality and coaching philosophy stem from his values as a family man, which explains why his teams tend to be so tight-knit. They're also tenacious, tough and instinctive.

BUT WHEN YOU ask him to characterize his current crop of Tigers, Anderson says it is yet to be determined.

"This team has to find its own identity," he says. "But they are still going to have some characteristics of last year's team."

For Mizzou fans who rode the wave of the 2008-09 season, that's just fine. The Tigers won a school-record 31 games, posted an 18-0 home record, won the Big 12 Tournament and reinvigorated Missouri basketball.

Anderson's squad never lost two games in a row, beating Kansas and Texas in dramatic fashion during the regular season and stunning No. 2 Memphis in the Sweet Sixteen 102-91 March 26, 2009, in Glendale, Ariz.

Although the season ended in the desert two days later with an 82-75 loss to the University of Connecticut in the Elite Eight, Coach A's signature style of play, The Fastest 40 Minutes in Basketball, has gained national respect.

Now Anderson envisions a Final Four and even a national championship in Mizzou's future. It is why, despite lucrative offers from other universities during the offseason, the coveted coach chose to stay in Columbia.

With the system firmly in place, Anderson has stamped his ID on the Missouri basketball program.

"We are going to be defensive-minded."

Though last year's squad was lauded for its depth, its persona was tethered to the dread-

locks of DeMarre Carroll, the all-conference forward selected by the Memphis Grizzlies in the first round of the NBA Draft.

Carroll, fellow forward Leo Lyons and 3-point specialist Matt Lawrence have moved on, taking with them nearly half of the Tigers' average points per game.

Headlining this year is 6-foot-3 senior guard J.T. Tiller, the 2009 Big 12 co-Defensive Player of the Year who finished the season with an offensive flourish. A preseason candidate for the John R. Wooden Player of the Year, Tiller frequently draws comparisons to motors, bulldogs and Tasmanian cartoon characters. But around campus he's known for his amiable disposition.

"If you ask someone about him, they'll say, 'J.T. Tiller always has a smile on his face,'" Anderson says.

Tiller — who tagged along with the coach as a freshman when Anderson arrived from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2006 — averaged 13 points a game in the NCAA Tournament and posted a career-high 23 points against Memphis. He underwent surgery in April to repair a torn ligament in his right shooting wrist that had hindered him since February, but the injury helped him to develop a left-handed shot. He now represents the top returning scorer at 8.4 points per game.

It was Zaire Taylor's clutch jumper that shocked the Jayhawks for a 62-60 MU home victory Feb. 9, 2009. As the other senior guard on a team with 11 players in their first or second year, Taylor brings back his cool

efficiency. Last season he led the Big 12 with a 3.0 assist/turnover ratio.

The Tigers' strength is unquestionably at the guard position, where sophomores Marcus Denmon, Kimmie English and Miguel Paul return after logging significant minutes last season. All three were instrumental during conference play and postseason, and freshman newcomer Mike Dixon will compete for playing time as well. Hard-working walk-on Jarrett Sutton, a junior guard, will also contribute when needed.

"We're ready to get after it and play year 'round," English says. "It's not like in high school where after the season they hand out track uniforms. We're basketball players."

"We are going to be up-tempo."

For the conditioned forward who likes to run the open floor, Anderson's game plan is ideal. Carroll and Lyons thrived in the system, and sophomores Laurence Bowers, Steve Moore and senior Keith Ramsey are next in line.

The 6-foot-9 Ramsey returns as the Tigers' best shot-blocker, and he will try to become more of an offensive presence in the paint where he averaged 3.6 points per game last season. At 6-foot-8, Bowers looks forward to a full, healthy season after struggling with a knee injury last year. The trimmed-down, 6-foot-9 Moore is a player Anderson has challenged to step up, and he is ready to make an impact at center after limited playing time in 2008-09.

Mizzou also welcomes a pair of freshman forwards in 6-foot-9 John Underwood and 6-foot-7 Tyler Stone.

But it's 6-foot-8 junior Justin Safford, an occasionally explosive scorer who showed surprising range at times last season, who becomes the team's most experienced forward. Safford's nine points in 15 minutes against Connecticut helped spark a Missouri rally versus the top-seeded Huskies in March.

With post players fighting for minutes,



 **KIMMIE ENGLISH**

Rarely quiet, sophomore Kimmie English is one of seven speedy guards on the Missouri roster.

Anderson hopes it will strengthen the Tigers' frontcourt.

"The great thing about our team last year is that we had competition," Anderson says. "Every day, it was easier for me to start a guy like Keith Ramsey because of the competition in practice."

"No one plays the way we do. No one."

With one second remaining in the first half of

the West Regional semifinal, Denmon hurled a 60-foot shot to give Missouri a 49-36 lead over Memphis. It was a defining moment in a season peppered with defining moments.

The unforgettable basket symbolized the long-shot odds Mizzou had overcome to reach the Elite Eight for the third time in school history. Picked seventh in the conference during preseason, a team with modest expectations found itself on the brink of the Final Four.

Now Missouri's frenetic strategy has

drawn praise for showcasing instinctive athletes and wearing down the opposition. Players want to play for Anderson, and he and his staff welcomed the problem of a shortened recruiting calendar because of the deep March run.

"Last season's success opened some doors for us," Anderson says. "We had people calling us about players and high school coaches approaching us everywhere we went. People would come up to me and say, 'I don't even like basketball, but you guys were fun to watch.'"

Missouri is again picked to finish seventh in the conference. Regardless of the identity the 2009-10 Tigers ultimately assume, they won't sneak up on Big 12 opponents this season. With committed players, rejuvenated faith in the program and a good coach, Mizzou has searched and found its engine.

"Coach Anderson built the culture here," Tiller says. "He's instilled the belief in us and in Mizzou fans everywhere that we're here to stay." ■

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Former Tigers go global

Mizzou claims a handful of NBA players, plus a number on international teams.

NBA

DeMarre Carroll	Memphis Grizzlies
Keyon Dooling	New Jersey Nets
Thomas Gardner	Free Agent
	Last year Atlanta Hawks
Kareem Rush	Los Angeles Clippers

EUROPE/FOREIGN

Travon Bryant	Greece
Jason Conley	Austria
Brian Dailey	Palestine
Clarence Gilbert	Spain
Kalen Grimes	Greece
Steffon Hannah	Lithuania
Arthur Johnson	Italy
Linus Kleiza	Greece
Matt Lawrence	Finland
Leo Lyons*	Israel
Jimmy McKinney	Germany
Rickey Paulding	Germany
Vaidotas Volkus	Lithuania
Kevin Young	Uruguay



Hoisting Stein

FOR COACH CINDY STEIN and the Missouri women's basketball team, the goals for 2009-10 are straightforward and streamlined.

"The expectations are to win, plain and simple," says Stein, who enters her 12th year at MU.

Wins have come at a premium lately for the Tigers, who finished last season 13-17 and 4-12 in the Big 12. The 2008-09 campaign ended with a heart-breaking 62-59 loss to the University of Texas in the Big 12 Tournament, a game in which the Tigers led 59-52 with 1:37 remaining.

But hopes are high for Mizzou, which loses only one player from last year's squad — guard Alyssa Hollins — and returns four seniors to provide on-court leadership.

At 6-foot-1, senior starting forward Jessa Johnson averaged 13 points per game and is the team's top returning scorer, rebounder and shot-blocker. Junior forward Shakara "Shak" Jones, redshirt sophomore guard Bekah Mills and junior guard RaeShara Brown also return as starters.

The Big 12 is arguably the best conference in the country, with six teams finishing in the top 25 last season. Having lost 11 games by 10 points or fewer, the Tigers remain confident that they can compete with anybody in the conference.

"Really, nobody rolled over us," Stein says. "We were in a lot of games last year in a really tough conference. A team that finished just above us [Kansas] in the standings made it to the finals of the National Invitational Tournament."

Stein plans to replace Hollins by committee, calling on several players to step up. The coach feels her team may have relied on the productive guard a bit too heavily at times last year. But if Missouri can improve its perimeter shooting, which was a league-worst 28.3 percent, the wins should follow.

"We've got to come in, shoot extra and do whatever it takes," Johnson says. "We have great shooters on this team, but if you want to be a shooter in the game, you have to be a shooter in practice." — Marcus Wilkins



Photo courtesy of MU Intercollegiate Athletics Media Relations
Forward Jessa Johnson, now a senior, drives past a Texas A&M defender Jan. 10, 2009, at Mizzou Arena. Johnson led the Tigers in rebounds and blocked shots in 2008-09.

Professors hit the hardwood

MU INSTRUCTORS are accustomed to calling the shots behind a lecture-hall podium. But when basketball Coach Mike Anderson laces up and joins the professors who regularly shoot hoops on campus, it's his class that's in session.

Since the 1960s, a group of MU academics have convened three times a week at the Student Recreation Complex. Playing styles and players have come and gone, but the effort is always earnest — especially when Anderson drops by.

"The intensity picks up a little bit when he's here," says John Faaborg, 60, professor of biological sciences and former guard at Iowa State University.

The games are played to 32 points with a handful of extra participants for substitution and no game clock. Players try to match up with opponents of similar size and ability, and since several professors have Division-I basketball experience, the quality of play is high.

"It's amazing how many games come down to the last shot," says retired educational psychology Professor Richard English, 73, who played college basketball at the University of Texas–Pan American during the 1950s. "My doctor said, 'Keep on doing what you're doing because it's working for you.'"

The professors are selective about who they let into their game, choosing players with enough basketball savvy to minimize injuries. In November 2008, Anderson was allowed into the exclusive club.

"I've taught at four different schools — the universities of Florida, Missouri, Wisconsin and Oklahoma — and each one has a professors' game similar to this," says Rod Uphoff, 59, director of MU's South African Education Program and former Wisconsin point guard.

All the players have an appreciation for the game, Anderson says. "That has allowed us to build some great relationships with

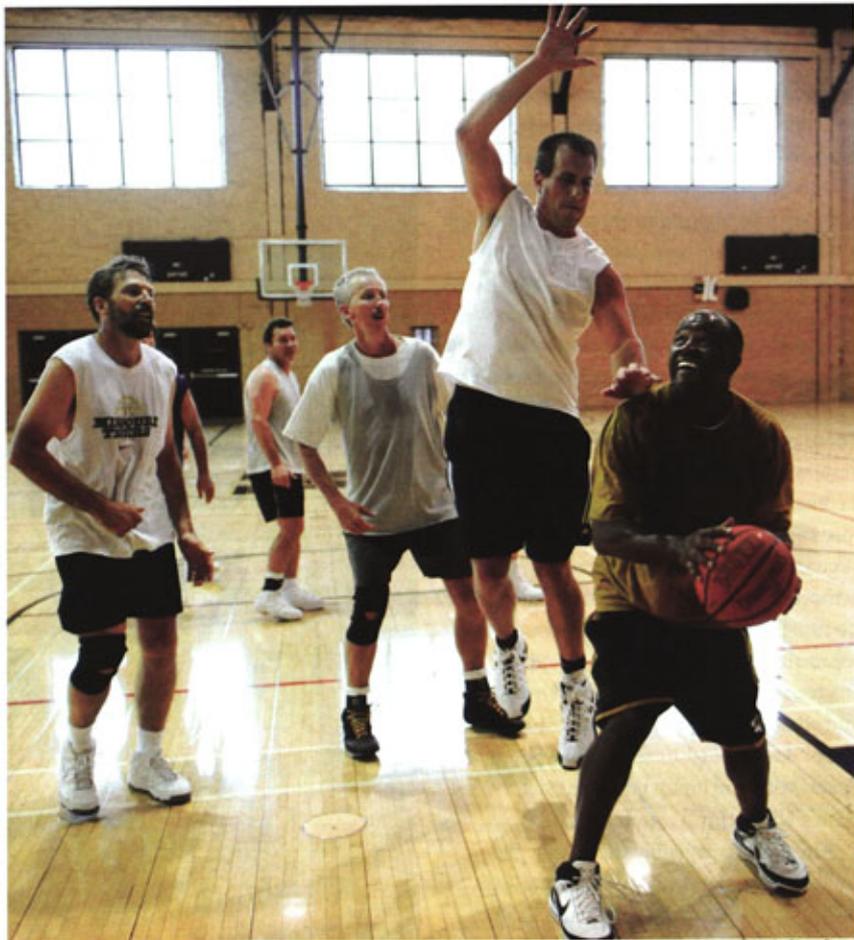


Photo by Shane Epping

one another and of course have some fun and stay in shape."

The cardiovascular camaraderie runs three games and lasts about 75 minutes. When Anderson plays, it's still *The Fastest 40 Minutes in Basketball*.

"One time, during a game, he yelled,

Tiger basketball Coach Mike Anderson, far right, gets a run for his money in the professors' game. Also pictured, from left, are Bill Lamberson, Kevin Everett, Rick Blakemore and Danny Fuemmeler.

"Dick, you need to break to the basket after you set that pick!" English says. "I said to myself, 'Coach, I'm only 73.'"

Roster

PLAYER	AGE	TITLE	PLAYING DAYS
Richard English	73	professor emeritus, educational psychology	University of Texas–Pan American
Kevin Everett	45	associate professor, family medicine	Rock Bridge HS, Columbia
John Faaborg	60	professor, avian ecology	Iowa State University
Danny Fuemmeler	39	business manager, School of Medicine	Salisbury (Mo.) HS
Joe Haslag	48	professor, economics	Springfield (Mo.) Catholic HS
Brick Johnstone	47	professor, health psychology	Duke University (football)
Tom Kochtanek	58	professor, information science	Parma (Ohio) Senior HS
Bill Lamberson	52	professor, animal sciences	Palmer (Neb.) HS
Rod Uphoff	59	director, University of Missouri South African Education Program	University of Wisconsin

Where is TJ?

FORMER TIGER basketball forward Tajudeen "TJ" Soyoye entertained fans at the Hearnes Center with his athleticism during two seasons spanning 1999 to 2001. Now he spends time across Stadium Boulevard at University Hospital as a resident in Family and Community Medicine. His life is good, he says, even if it seems awash in contradictions: He is 6,200 miles from his birthplace of Lagos, Nigeria, but feels very much at home at MU. He sometimes feels emotionally exhausted from the demands of the residency, but he is doing what he wants to do.

Growing up in Nigeria, Soyoye, BS '01, got a close look at another kind of medicine — herbalism — by observing his father at work. "I watched as people came into his office sick and left healthy," Soyoye says.

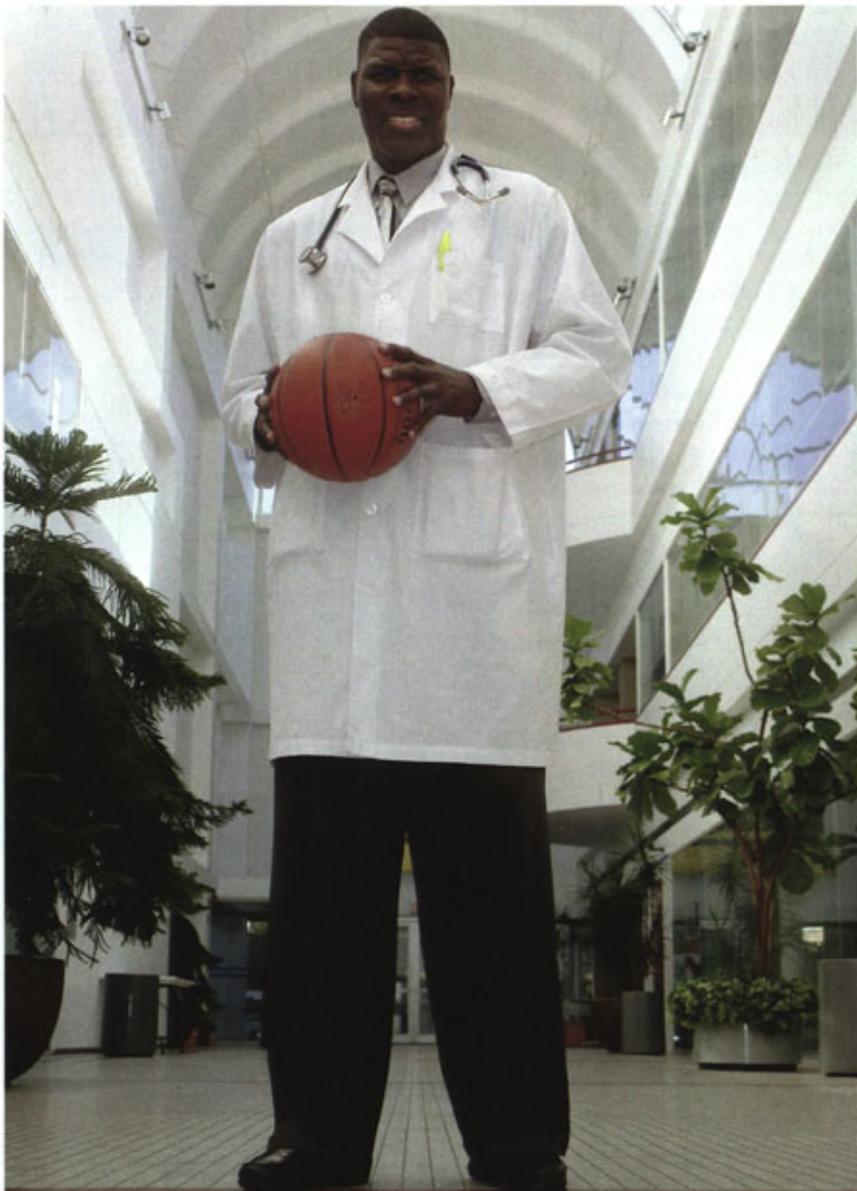
Although Soyoye's father encouraged him to go into Western medicine, that support had a flipside: His father disliked any time spent on sports. "As a boy playing

on teams, I had to cook up stories. When I played basketball for the Nigerian national team, my name and photo were sometimes in the paper. My sister would tear out the sports section before my father saw it."

Soyoye didn't like doing those things, but he sensed that basketball would be his path to medical school. Sure enough, after graduating from MU with a bachelor's degree in

biological sciences, he continued on to medical school at American University of Antigua/KMC and now to his residency at MU. Soyoye is a U.S. citizen, and he'd like to return to Nigeria and practice medicine some day. But for now he needs to finish his training.

It's tough at times, and he misses having time to shoot hoops. But, he says, "This is my dream, and I'm living it."



Former Tiger Tajudeen "TJ" Soyoye, BS '01, shown here in the atrium outside the health sciences library, enjoys his life as a family and community medicine resident at MU. Photo by Rob Hill

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