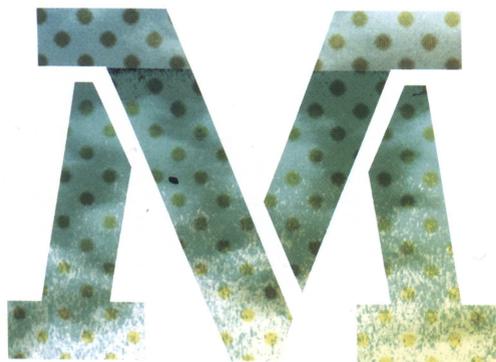




# CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

With his fleet of talented transfers, a pair of returning top-flight guards and a soaring fan favorite back from injury, Frank Haith pilots the 2012–13 Tigers into the SEC.

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Missouri skies have never been friendlier.

A record 34,748 students enrolled at MU in fall 2012. Local festivals — such as True/False and Roots N Blues N BBQ — attract more revelers every year. Columbia Regional Airport even added Atlanta flights in part to accommodate fans for Mizzou's move to the Southeastern Conference.

You'll have to forgive Frank Haith for adding to the air traffic. Upon the basketball coach's arrival from the University of Miami in April 2011, he inherited a senior-heavy squad and immediately began addressing impending roster turnover. By courting transfers from California to Connecticut and Alabama to Oregon, Haith has flown in enough talent to avoid a precipitous drop-off in experienced players.

"There were not a lot of players available for us to recruit because of the [late] timing when we got here," says Haith, who will introduce to Mizzou five transfers from top-division schools in 2012-13. "Now, if you look at the breakdown of our classes, we've got four seniors, three juniors, four freshmen and a couple of sophomores. You don't have one of those huge recruiting classes and then huge losses."

It would be hard not to qualify Marcus Denmon, Kim English and Ricardo Ratliffe — players who have moved to the professional ranks from this past season's 30-win team — as huge losses. But the return of savvy guards Mike Dixon and Phil Pressey, and a now-healthy Laurence Bowers at forward, should ease the transition, while a freshmen influx brings up the rear.

Haith believes the mishmash of veterans, transfers and rookies share three commonalities: character, skill and toughness. After an unprecedented season for a first-year coach at MU, Haith will try to navigate new opponents with a revamped roster as the Tigers jet toward a new frontier.

### **THIS IS YOUR CAPTAIN SPEAKING**

To many Mizzou fans, Haith was a relatively obscure choice to lead the program in 2011-12. With 25 years of experience as an assistant and head coach, he knows it takes more than talent for teams to rise above dazzling individual play.

Haith is wary of the preseason praise that pundits have heaped on this transfer class. "You need chemistry and intangibles. Last year's

team did the little things, and each player had an individual role. This year, we still have to *define* those roles."

Haith's staff leads one of the most impressive collections of offensive skill in recent memory, starting with top returning scorer Mike Dixon (Kansas City, Mo.). Last season's Big 12 Sixth Man of the Year didn't start a single game, but is a leader as a senior guard.

Along with CBS Sports Preseason All-American Phil "Flip" Pressey (Dallas), who led the Big 12 in assists (6.4) and steals (2.1) per game, Mizzou's point-guard tandem notched 339 combined assists for a team that finished 11th in that category nationally (16.2 per game).

"I think it's simple, really: We have a lot of guys who know how to play unselfish basketball the way it's meant to be played," Dixon says. "I think you're going to see more strong finishes at the rim and a lot more alley-oops."

To rehearse that intricate choreography, the Tigers flew to Europe this summer and played clubs from the Netherlands, Belgium and France.

The biggest transfer, 6-foot-9, 225-pound Alex Oriakhi, picked up where he left off at the University of Connecticut in 2011-12. The nature of UConn's NCAA violations was such that the forward can play immediately for Mizzou instead of sitting out for the typically required season. Oriakhi (Lowell, Mass.) brings an inside presence the Tigers haven't seen in nearly a decade. He also brings national championship maturity.

"The team that won the NCAA tournament wasn't even ranked at the beginning of the season," says Oriakhi, referring to UConn's 2011 title team. "I have also been part of some really talented teams that haven't been successful, so I don't buy into the hype."

Fans who attended the 2011 Black and Gold Game — or caught a Pepperdine or Auburn game on TV in 2010-11 — will remember senior guard Keion Bell (Los Angeles) and junior forward Earnest Ross (Cary, N.C.). Both transferred to Mizzou and sat out last season after averaging an impressive 18.9 and 13.1 points at their respective former schools.

"You can expect a lot of athleticism from me," says Bell, who ignited YouTube and ESPN by aviating over five teammates to win a Pepperdine dunk contest in 2009, then upped it by one to clear six fans at Mizzou Madness Oct. 12, 2012. "People don't talk about Earnest's athleticism, but he's just as athletic as I am, if not more."

Joining the team after the fall semester is red-shirt sophomore Jabari Brown (Oakland, Calif.), a five-star transfer from the University of Oregon

whom Haith calls “a big-time shooter, probably the best on the team.”

Junior forward Tony Criswell (Oklahoma City), like Ratliffe before him, is a community college transfer who has added weight to his 6-foot-9-inch frame and looks to break out at the Division I level. Rounding out the transfers, sophomore Danny Feldmann (Jefferson City, Mo.) is a rangy forward and former Ivy-leaguer from Columbia University.

The freshman class includes a pair of Canadians in forward Stefan Jankovic (Mississauga, Ontario) and guard Negus Webster-Chan (Scarborough, Ontario); a guard as physical as his name suggests in Dominique Bull (Worcester, Mass.); forward Ryan Rosburg (Chesterfield, Mo.); and coach’s son Corey Haith (Columbia).

From Mizzou faithful, however, no player will receive a louder welcome when the season begins than senior forward Laurence Bowers. Poised to be one of the top returning players on last year’s ultimate Big 12 squad, Bowers tore his left anterior cruciate ligament Oct. 3, 2011, in the offseason.

“I definitely increased my basketball IQ last season watching from the bench,” Bowers says. “From the last time I played to the first time I step on the court, it will be 18 months. It can’t get here fast enough.”

## THE WILD BLUE YONDER

Like the 2012 Mizzou football team, the basketball team enters the conference home of the defending national champs. The Kentucky Wildcats dominated the league and the Associated Press Top 25 Poll for the entire season before marching through the NCAA tournament to cut down the nets.

“SEC teams are very athletic, and we’ll have to get used to that,” Haith says. “The Big 12 is a more physical league, but they’re both power conferences, right down the line — Kansas-Kentucky. Texas-Florida: They mirror one another.”

The Tigers would just as soon forget their 2012 NCAA Tournament experience — an 86-84 crash-and-burn against underdog Norfolk State.

But Mizzou’s 30-5 season also netted a Big 12 Tournament Championship and an AP National Coach of the Year honor for the first-year coach, all but negating his semiturbulent arrival.

“I was not a popular hire, let’s be honest,” says Haith. “It was a fun year, but at the beginning, we had an injury to Bowers and some said he was our best player. We were picked fourth in the conference. It was a big gamble.”

Now, with the confidence that comes from experience, the Tigers expect to take off. Attitude will determine altitude. **M**

## Men’s schedule

Battle 4 Atlantis in Nassau, Bahamas	
Nov. 22	vs. Stanford
Nov. 23	Louisville / Northern Iowa
Nov. 24	TBD
Dec. 1	vs. Appalachian State
Dec. 4	vs. SEMO
Dec. 8	vs. Tennessee State
Dec. 17	vs. South Carolina State
Dec. 22	vs. Illinois in St. Louis
Dec. 28	at UCLA
Jan. 5	vs. Bucknell
Jan. 8	vs. Alabama
Jan. 12	at Ole Miss
Jan. 16	vs. Georgia
Jan. 19	at Florida
Jan. 22	vs. South Carolina
Jan. 26	vs. Vanderbilt
Jan. 30	at LSU
Feb. 2	vs. Auburn
Feb. 7	at Texas A&M
Feb. 9	vs. Ole Miss
Feb. 13	at Mississippi State
Feb. 16	at Arkansas
Feb. 19	vs. Florida
Feb. 23	at Kentucky
Feb. 28	at South Carolina
March 2	vs. LSU
March 5	vs. Arkansas
March 9	at Tennessee
SEC Tournament	
March 13–17 in Nashville, Tenn.	

## Women’s schedule

Cancun Challenge in Cancun, Mexico	
Nov. 22	vs. Wichita State
Nov. 23	vs. Green Bay
Nov. 24	vs. Minnesota
Nov. 29	vs. SEMO
Dec. 3	vs. Tennessee-Martin
Dec. 6	vs. Missouri State
Dec. 8	vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff
Dec. 16	vs. Southern Illinois
Dec. 18	vs. Morgan State
Dec. 20	vs. Murray State
Dec. 29	at Memphis
Jan. 3	at Georgia
Jan. 6	vs. Auburn
Jan. 10	at Tennessee
Jan. 13	vs. Kentucky
Jan. 20	at Ole Miss
Jan. 24	vs. Arkansas
Jan. 27	at Texas A&M
Jan. 31	vs. Florida
Feb. 3	vs. Tennessee
Feb. 10	vs. Mississippi State
Feb. 14	at Vanderbilt
Feb. 17	at Arkansas
Feb. 21	vs. LSU
Feb. 24	at Auburn
Feb. 28	vs. South Carolina
March 3	at Alabama
SEC Tournament	
March 6–March 10 in Duluth, Ga.	

## Plotting Trajectory

With two children younger than 5 and a bevy of basketball recruits set to join MU, Mizzou women’s Coach Robin Pingeton is used to ushering in youth.

Pingeton enters her third season in 2012–13 with an inexperienced Tiger squad transitioning to the Southeastern Conference. Nine of 13 players on the roster are freshmen or sophomores, and last season’s top two scorers — Christine Flores and BreAnna Brock — have graduated. Of late, the SEC might appear slightly less challenging than the Big 12, home of the undefeated defending champion Baylor Bears (40-0). It’s all relative, of course.

“For us, because of where we are with our program, both conferences are big challenges,” Pingeton says.

The Tigers are deep at the perimeter, starting with senior guards Sydney Crafton (Jefferson City, Mo.) and Liene Priede (Riga, Latvia). Pingeton predicts that freshman Lianna Doty (St. Louis) will quickly become a fan favorite with her speedy style of play, and sophomore Bree Fowler (Kansas City, Mo.) saw significant minutes in 2011–12. High school stars and twin freshmen guards Morgan and Maddie Stock (Town and Country, Mo.) join the team with lofty expectations, and sophomore Morgan Eye (Montrose, Mo.) led Mizzou in 3-pointers with 63 last season.

Senior center Liz Smith (Overland Park, Kan.) played few minutes as Flores’ backup, but her role will increase in 2012–13. Forward Bri Kulas (Shawnee Mission, Kan.), the team’s only junior, began her career at Kansas State University and transferred to Mizzou from Johnson County (Kansas) Community College.

“Our four focus points are going to be on transition defense, rebounding, taking care of the basketball and knocking down open shots,” Pingeton says. “If we can do those things, we’ll put ourselves in a good position to win.”



† Senior guard Sydney Crafton drives past Baylor’s Jordan Madden Feb. 1, 2012, at Mizzou Arena.