

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

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 Jessra Johnson averaged 13 points per game and is the team's top returning scorer, rebounder and shot-blocker. Junior forward Shakara “Shak” Jones,



Forward Jessra 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. Photo courtesy Mizzou Media Relations

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.”

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916 |
E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

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