

SPORTS

McPhee-McCuin's Ole Miss program has \$5 million budget



BREAKFAST MEETING – In Mississippi recently, Women's Head Coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin, center hosted her father, Coach Gladstone "Moon" McPhee, at left, and veteran media personality/columnist Fred Sturup, right, at a breakfast meeting.

Coach Yo crafting Rebels progress chart with NCAA berth in mind (1)

Something special and exciting is going on with the University of Mississippi's women's basketball program.

Ignore the 8-16 overall record following a 76-42 defeat at the hands of the South Carolina Gamecocks this past Thursday. More significant are the two victories thus far in the Southeast Conference (one more than all of last season).

Director of Athletics Ross Bjork holds firmly to the conviction that Coach Yo "is on the right track" regarding rebuilding the program.



Sports Scope

by Fred Sturup

"This year is about putting all of the ingredients together so that we can build the program the right way to have long-term success," said Bjork as was pointed out in a previous Sports Scope column.

Coach Yo is of the same mindset, but she has a time frame for phases of progress. The native Grand Bahamian, in a recent exclusive interview in her office at the University of Mississippi, said the second year would produce a much different Lady Rebels team, with conference prominence, and very likely a Women's National Invitational Tournament (WNIT) invitation to follow, and subsequently a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA Division 1) berth by the fifth year.

It's a tall order for sure, but such is expected of Coach Yo. She was brought on board to transform the Ole Miss Women's Basketball program. The

early forecast is that she will be up to the task.

The job is not an easy one and requires perpetual focus. Coach Yo was quite candid and detailed in the up-close and personal interview.

"Well, I usually get up about 6 a. m. depending on whether I have early meetings. Then, I would just get up and make sure the kids (two girls...six-year-old Yasmine and one-year-old Yuri) have breakfast. Kelly (husband) helps out, vice versa. Then, I go to my office, work out, shower and get into my mainstream work day which starts at about 8:30 a. m. and runs until around 6 or 7 p.m.

What's a day in the "Ole Miss working life" of Coach Yo like?

She has a staff of 12 and networking with each is imperative, in order for the head of women's basketball program to ensure that she knows everything that is going on within her portfolio, inclusive of an annual budget in the neighborhood of \$5 million.

"My day includes meetings with my staff, preparing for the next opponent; meeting with players; meeting with administration; external meetings; sometimes boosters; having to deal with a lot of signage for recruits; the whole nine yards.

"Yes, it's pretty hectic," admitted Coach Yo.

Then, there is game day, which takes on added dimensions.

"Game day for me? I usually go in and watch films, have a meeting with the staff and have a shoot-around. After the shoot-around, I usually take a nap. I get about a 30-minute nap and then I get up and back into the flow. I get to the game about an hour and 20 minutes before the tipoff. Then, there is the game focus," informed Coach Yo.

All the aforementioned of course, is done with the respective roles of her staff members important to the big picture. McPhee-McCuin, in the seventh season as a head coach in NCAA Division 1, recorded her 100th victory earlier this year. She is impressed and happy with the support given by those who work for her.

"I have 12 immediate people who work for me, three assistant coaches; a secretary; director of



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~ Coach Yolett McPhee-McCuin

player engagement; director of on-campus recruitment; director of operations; strength and condition trainer;

graduate assistant and department managers," related Coach, most satisfyingly, because of the comfortable networking she ex-

periences with them.

The wide body of work and responsibilities associated with growing the women's basket-

ball program take up a whole lot of the coaches' time within any 24-hour span. A constant challenge on a daily basis is being a female in a demanding position. As a mother, her overall role is much more burdensome than her male peers.

Coach Yo acknowledged the difficulties faced.

"As a mother, it is a tough feat. I know a lot of people back home do not understand what my daily grind looks like. When you get home, no matter how your day has gone, the kids, they want mom...they want mommy. So, I have to be there for them.

"They don't have a read on the situation. They don't evaluate my work load. Sometimes, just before a game, there is a motherly duty I have to take care of. You have to be that for them. So, the truth is that there is usually not an off time for me. I am usually, pretty much on the job, whether in my personal life or with the Ole Miss responsibilities. There are my duties at Ole Miss and then it's about being a wife, a mother; and cooking meals because I'm still domestic, having watched my mom (Daisy).

"It's a tough job, just trying to keep everything afloat. It's easier for men, in this position, because they have their wives to do all the other stuff. But, a woman who is a wife and a mother...it's like two jobs," added the daughter of the legendary Coach Gladstone "Moon" McPhee.

Thus far, she has been incredible at marrying all of her duties, personal and otherwise and attaining success at a high level. She came to the University of Mississippi for the second leg of her head coach career. McPhee-McCuin was at the University of Jacksonville from 2013 to 2018 and led her squad to three 20-plus win seasons, an NCAA invitation and two appearances in the Women's National Invitation Tournament (WNIT).

She insists her progress template will remain in place in Mississippi.

(Part two of this series is to follow. To respond to this column kindly contact Fred Sturup at sturup1504@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at 727-6363).