

# Tennessee State to play on one of college basketball's grandest stages

David Bocclair - Nashville Post - July 13, 2016

Tennessee State's men's basketball program took a big step forward in the number of games it won last season.

Next season the Tigers will step up their level of competition — in one game, at least.

Five-time national champion Duke revealed its 2016-17 non-conference contests Wednesday and notable among those 13 games was one against Tennessee State. The Tigers will play the Blue Devils at storied Cameron Indoor Stadium on Dec. 19. Tip-off time is to be determined.

The game will be Duke's next-to-last before it begins Atlantic Coast Conference play.

"I think it will be a good experience for us, no matter what the outcome may be," coach Dan Ford told the Nashville Post. "... We're just using it as a total experience — a learning experience, a memory experience. When you think of Duke, that's as good as it gets in college basketball.

"I think Duke will be No. 1 in the country. And to go in there and win at their place will be extremely difficult for anybody, let alone an Ohio Valley Conference team. But we'll try to win the game, for sure."

TSU tied a program record with 20 wins in 2015-16. That was 15 more wins than it totaled the previous season, the first under Ford, and made it one of the most improved teams in Division I basketball.

That schedule included just one opponent from among the country's top conferences. The Tigers lost 74-69 at Tennessee.

Ford said this year's non-conference slate is not quite finished. Having improved so much from one season to the next has made it a bit more difficult to find teams willing to add TSU

to their schedules.

"That first year people were really knocking down our door to play, but this year it was a little more difficult," Ford said. "It wasn't impossible, like it is for some good mid-majors.

"One of the areas it's really notched up is in our guarantee games, where people pay us to come and play. And that's what this Duke game is."

It's also guaranteed to be an unforgettable experience for the players and coaches who will get to take part in it.

# TSU coach Dana Ford gets raise, contract extension

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - August 3, 2016

Tennessee State men's basketball coach Dana Ford signed a two-year contract extension, athletics director Teresa Phillips told The Tennessean on Wednesday

Ford, who led the Tigers to one of their best seasons as an NCAA Division program in 2015-16, agreed to a deal that will keep him at TSU through the 2020-21 season.

Phillips also said Ford received a \$30,000 raise. He is now making \$220,000 annually.

Ford, 32, is one of the nation's youngest coaches. He was hired in 2014 and led the Tigers to their second consecutive five-win season in 2014-15.

This past season the Tigers improved to 20-11 and Ford was named the Ohio Valley Conference Coach of the Year and was given the Ben Jobe Award, given to the nation's top NCAA Division I minority coach.

It marked only the third time TSU has won 20 games in a season.

"You always want a coach who is able to stay ahead of his recruiting class and be able to tell anybody he's bringing in as a freshman, 'I've got four or five more years on my contract so I'm going to be here,'" Phillips said. "And we want Dana to know that we plan on sticking with him through any ups and downs. We're committed to his leadership for our men's basketball program. And every once in awhile he's going to want a little more money and other things as you move along with that."

Along with the extension and raise, Phillips promised Ford that she is committed to making upgrades to the team's playing facility and other amenities.

"Most of what we discussed with Dana were things that we can do to improve the pro-

gram," Phillips said. "From trying to improve Gentry Center, branding within that building, his offices, the team's locker rooms; things that will impact the kids. We haven't gotten those things done, but that's what we're looking to do this year."

Ford led TSU to its first postseason tournament — the CollegeInsider.com Tournament — since 2012-13.

The Tigers return three starters from last year's team along with Christian Mekowulu, a 6-foot-9 starter in 2014-15, who missed the 2015-16 season with an injury.

"We're happy where we are," Ford said. "We like our team, we like who we work with and who we work for and it's truly hard for us to complain right now."

Ford said he was thankful for the extension, which will benefit him in recruiting.

"It shows a commitment to what we're doing with the program," he said. "Obviously, we're committed to the university; we work as hard as we possibly can everyday. Our kids do the best they can everyday. That vote of confidence from the administration is definitely a good thing for everyone that's involved, including our recruits."

Ford said he is counting on the improvements Phillips talked about making to Gentry Center and the team's other facilities.

"I think those things are really important, especially if we can get over the hump and start winning championships," he said. "Those are some of the things that come after that. We still have to keep everything in perspective. We did have a great year, but we still finished second in the (OVC East) regular season and we lost a game that we probably should not have lost in the conference tournament."

"So it's not like we're ready to receive everything right now, but hopefully we can continue to take some steps to where those things become a part of the program."

# Belmont, TSU, Austin Peay among OVC's best basketball teams

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - October 26, 2016

With the emergence of the Tennessee State and Austin Peay men's basketball teams, a name might need to be created to attach to the rivalry those teams have with each other and Belmont.

Sort of like the popular Battle of the Boulevard, which Belmont's series with neighborhood rival Lipscomb has gone by for many years.

TSU and Austin Peay now are being mentioned with mainstay Belmont as contenders for the Ohio Valley Conference championship.

TSU is coming off only its third 20-win season as an NCAA Division I program, while Austin Peay is the defending OVC Tournament champion.

"If I'm being selfish about what I want, it's OK with me if (TSU and Austin Peay) are not very good," Belmont coach Rick Byrd said. "But the honest truth is it's like the old days with us and Lipscomb. It's not like you really want to pull for them because you're supposed to be finding ways to beat them. But it makes our league so much more interesting and better when those local teams are that way."

Belmont's men's and women's teams were picked to win the OVC regular-season championships at the league's media day Wednesday at Sheraton Music City in a poll of coaches and sports information directors.

Belmont senior Evan Bradds, the OVC Player of the Year last season, was tabbed the Preseason Player of the Year. He was joined on the All-OVC Preseason Team by senior teammate Taylor Barnette along with TSU's Tahjere McCall and Wayne Martin, Austin Peay's Josh Robinson and Tennessee Tech's Aleksa Jugovic.

TSU's men were picked to finish second in the East, and Austin Peay was picked third in the West behind Murray State and Eastern Illinois.

"It's good when us, TSU and Austin Peay are good because Nashville is the center of the league," Byrd said. "A vast majority of the media coverage comes from the Nashville area. Plus, you're talking about two really good people (Dana Ford at TSU and Dave Loos at Austin Peay) that are in charge of those two programs. It was pretty easy for me to be really happy when Austin Peay won that (tournament) championship last year because of who coaches that team."

Loos, who is headed into his 27th season at Austin Peay, said he hopes he can keep the Governors, with three returning starters, in the hunt for the championship.

"Belmont and TSU are going to be good, and it's fun to play those rivalry games when all the teams are good," Loos said. "TSU and Belmont are outstanding teams. They've both got to be mentioned when you talk about the East."

TSU snapped a six-game losing streak against Belmont by beating the Bruins (87-72) in the final regular-season game in 2015-16 and then lost to Austin Peay (74-72) in the first round of the conference tournament.

Ford, the 2015-16 OVC Coach of the Year, turned the Tigers around in one season.

They had posted a 5-26 overall record and 2-14 in the OVC in 2014-15, but still have a long way to go in order to threaten Belmont consistently for the East Division title.

"I just told our team the other day, going from last to second (in the East) is a shorter distance than from going second to first," Ford said. "So I mean, we've still got a long way to go. You have to be really good to beat Belmont, especially over the course of a conference season. You have to realize that Belmont hardly ever loses a game they're supposed to win. That's a sign of a high-performance team. We per-

formed well last year, but we need to start performing at a higher level if we want to go from second to first."

## **TSU hoops off to best start in more than 20 years**

David Bocclair - Nashville Post - November 14, 2016

Three wins constitute the best start in two decades for Tennessee State's basketball team.

The Tigers swept the Cable Car Classic in Santa Clara, Calif. with three victories in as many days capped by Sunday's 69-61 victory over the host school. They opened with a 78-64 victory over UC Davis on Friday and followed with a 69-65 triumph over Northern Arizona on Saturday.

The last time TSU started a season with three consecutive victories was 1994-95.

Players and coaches have a few days to enjoy the situation. Tehir next game is Saturday at Middle Tennessee State (6:30 p.m.).

"It means a lot," guard Jordan Reed said. "Coming out here to California, going all out for the team. It's more so a confidence builder. I feel like we can build on top of that, knowing we went 3-0 and are going back victorious, that's big for us."

Tahjere McCall led the Tigers in scoring the first two contests and averaged 15.3 points for the three games. The 2015-16 Ohio Valley Conference Defensive Player of the Year also had 11 steals. Wayne Martin led the team in rebounds in all three and averaged a double-double (12.7 points, 11 rebounds).

"For a lot of our guys, it's their first time playing Division I," Martin said. "They got their jitters out and now they know what Division I feels like. It was good."

They'll have to wait to know how it feels to lose.

# TSU Tigers Off To A Roaring Start Under Ford

Mike Roberson - For The African American Athlete - November 17, 2016

The Tennessee State University Men's Basketball team is off to a 3-0 start, thanks to, in part, the reigning Ohio Valley Conference Coach of the Year.

Dana Ford, 32, is at the beginning of his third campaign as the head man of the Big Blue Hoopers.

As the youngest hired coach in Division I basketball, Ford is one of the rising stars on the bench, and the university realizing his value, extended his current contract through 2021.

The Tigers just completed a road trip to California and swept through the competition and won a historic tournament.

The 50th Annual Cable Car Classic, which has hosted great teams and players over the decades, at the Santa Clara University locale, had the Nashville based Historically Black College/University defeat UC-Davis, Northern Arizona, and the host, SCU Broncos, in succession November 11-13, 2016.

Dana's background included being a prep star player at Egyptian High in Tamms, IL, garnering awards in Southern Land of Lincoln.

As one of the top players in Illinois, Ford had a few options at his disposal, but decided to stay in state and take his skills to Normal, IL, and sign as a Illinois State Redbird. While at ISU, Dana had a solid, but not spectacular four years of collegiate play, and when he wasn't selected by any team in the 2006 NBA Draft, coaching seemed to be in his future.

Ford started off as a graduate assistant for Winthrop and Wichita State under the tutelage of Greg Marshall for two seasons.

In 2008, Dana became an official assistant coach with Chipola College in Florida.

After a year in the Sunshine State, he headed to the Music City and was an assistant coach at TSU under John Cooper, while unknowingly foreshadowing his future head coaching home during the two-year stint.

Next he returned back to Wichita State, this time as Greg Marshall's assistant coach.

The following season the opportunity to return to his Alma Mater (Illinois State) as an assistant coach came to be, and Ford had a two-year Homecoming.

In 2014, eight years after the draft disappointment, Ford was invited back to the Country Music Capital of the World, but this time would be as the Head Coach of the men's team.

His inaugural season as the top guy for the Tigers only netted five wins; however, Year 2 was an absolute 180-degree turn, as Big Blue improved by 15 games. With a 20-win season under his belt, honors and praise are enveloping him, but that also brings pressure and high expectations.

A perfect start to the 2016-17 year, and perceived job security, Coach Dana Ford has the opportunity to put his imprint on the impressive legacy of Tennessee State University Athletics.

# Blue Raiders fall to Tennessee State

Jordan Mayton - The Daily News Journal - November 19, 2016

Wayne Martin and the Tennessee State Tigers (4-0) were too much for Middle Tennessee Saturday night, beating the Blue Raiders (2-1) 74-63.

It marked MTSU's first loss of the season and the first time in the last 11 meetings that the Blue Raiders have lost to the Tigers. This is also Kermit Davis's only loss to Tennessee State in nine meetings.

Here were five keys to the game:

## **WILLIAMS SITS FIRST HALF**

Senior forward JaCorey Williams, the Blue Raiders leading scorer, played only two minutes in the first half, scoring two points. The Arkansas transfer got into early foul trouble, hindering his playing time. When he returned in the second, he was highly effective, scoring 16 in the period. However, it seemed too little, too late after the first half exit.

## **MISSED FREE THROWS**

The Blue Raiders were abysmal from the line, hitting 7-19 from the stripe. The more surprising stat is that Middle managed to go 1-6 in the second half. Coach Davis claims that charity shots had little to do with the outcome.

"Reggie (Upshaw) goes four-for-eight, Giddy (Potts) went one-for-four," Davis said after the game. "We have to shoot a better percentage, but that wasn't the reason we got beat."

## **RAIDERS BEAT ON BOARDS**

This marks the first time on the year that Middle Tennessee was beaten in the rebounding category. Only two players finished the game with more than five boards. Seniors Williams and Upshaw were physically outmatched by the TSU big men.

## **MARTIN MANHANDLES THE MIDDLE**

TSU forward Wayne Martin looked unstoppable Saturday night, recording a double-double in the first half and finishing the game with 22 points and 13 rebounds. The 6-foot 7-inch senior handled the Blue Raider posts throughout the game, accounting for more than a third of his team's points.

"Last year when we played (Middle Tennessee), they doubled me," said Martin. "This year, because I didn't have as good of a start, I guess they just wanted to see what I was going to do."

## **POTTS MISSING IN LOSS**

Junior Giddy Potts led the NCAA in three-point field goal percentage last season, but struggled to find a rhythm in Saturday's game. The Athens, Alabama native finished the game shooting 2-8, scoring a season-low five points.



## Associated Press Top 25 Poll

November 21, 2016

### COLLEGE BASKETBALL

#### AP Top 25

	Record	Pts	Prv
1. Kentucky (42)	4-0	1,592	2
2. Villanova (21)	5-0	1,561	3
3. Indiana (2)	3-0	1,443	6
4. North Carolina	4-0	1,399	5
5. Kansas	2-1	1,374	7
6. Duke	4-1	1,337	1
7. Virginia	3-0	1,198	8
8. Arizona	3-0	1,129	10
9. Xavier	5-0	1,099	11
10. Louisville	3-0	947	12
11. Gonzaga	3-0	872	14
12. Creighton	4-0	770	22
13. Oregon	2-1	748	4
14. UCLA	4-0	735	16
15. St. Mary's	3-0	703	17
16. Wisconsin	2-1	666	9
17. Purdue	2-1	613	15
18. Syracuse	3-0	610	18
19. West Virginia	3-0	474	19
20. Baylor	3-0	371	NR
21. Iowa State	3-0	319	20
22. Texas	3-0	251	23
23. Rhode Island	4-1	217	21
24. Michigan State	2-2	183	13
25. Michigan	4-0	89	NR
25. Florida State	4-0	89	NR

**Others receiving votes:** California 56, Maryland 55, Miami 44, Cincinnati 39, Wichita St 36, Florida 34, Seton Hall 15, Dayton 14, Butler 14, Virginia Tech 12, Notre Dame 6, Colorado 4, Ohio State 4, Ohio 1, Rutgers 1, Tennessee State 1.

**Dropped from rankings:** Cincinnati 24, California 25.

# Unbeaten Tennessee State goes polling

David Bocclair - Nashville Post - November 21, 2016

People have started to take notice of Tennessee State's men's basketball program.

compare favorably to some of the best teams in the country.

The Tigers have won their first four games for the first time since 1994-95, which was enough for them to be ranked 20th in the latest CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25, released Monday.

Their next game is Wednesday at Canisius (6 p.m., ESPN3).

That is the highest ranking in program history. TSU was ranked for one week in 2015-16 (24th in mid-January) and one week in 2012 (No. 25).

Additionally, TSU earned one vote in the Associated Press top 25.

The CollegeInsider.com ranking is determined by a vote of 31 college basketball coaches. The Associated Press is the product of a nationwide panel of sportswriters.

Gonzaga is the No. 1 team in the Mid-Major Top 25, which includes Belmont (No. 9), Chattanooga (No. 10) and East Tennessee State (No. 22).

TSU notched its first three victories when it swept the Cable Car Classic in Santa Clara, California. Last Saturday, it defeated Middle Tennessee State University 74-63.

"It (was) a really good win for us, but it's one of those things where we can now relax because we did it," coach Dana Ford said following the victory over MTSU. "But again, for our university, some of our former players, our alums, I'm happy for them (Saturday) that they could experience a win.

"... We have so much respect for (MTSU). A lot of times when we're out recruiting, we're measuring ourselves to the standard of this program."

Now there are those who believe the Tigers



## Midstate hoops: TSU aims for best start in DI history

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - November 21, 2016

Tennessee State fans who were grateful for the successful season the Tigers enjoyed last season will have more for which to be thankful if the Tigers win their next game, Wednesday at Canisius.

The Tigers have a shot at being 5-0 on Thanksgiving, which would mark their best start ever as an NCAA Division I program.

They pushed their record to 4-0 by upsetting Middle Tennessee State 74-63 on Saturday night.

That matched their best start since moving from Division II to Division I in 1977-78. They won their first four games that year under longtime coach Ed Martin and again in 1994-95 under Frankie Allen.

"We anticipated being able to compete against everybody we're playing here at the beginning," coach Dana Ford said. "You never know if you're going to win or lose, but we just wanted to be able to compete against the teams we're playing, and so far our guys have answered that challenge every game."

TSU received a vote on Monday for the Associated Press Top 25 and is ranked 20th in the CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25.

"We've won a different way each time," Ford said. "In a couple of those games out in California (Cable Car Classic) we got out to big leads and then gave up big leads. Then another time it was kind of nip-and-tuck, back-and-forth. We're just competing right now at a pretty high level, and as a coach, that's really all you can ask."

Three players — Tahjere McCall, Wayne Martin and Darreon Reddick — who last year helped TSU post only its third 20-win season as an NCAA Division I program, have teamed with newcomer Jordan Reed, a transfer from Bing-

hamton, to lead this year's squad.

Reed was tabbed the Ohio Valley Conference co-newcomer of the week along with Murray State's Jonathan Stark on Monday.

Reed is a 6-4 senior wing who Ford had told fans before the season would be a valuable addition. The Philadelphia native had 23 double-doubles at Binghamton, which ranks seventh in the NCAA among active players, and he barely missed adding another against MTSU when he had 23 points and nine rebounds.

"Jordan makes us bigger, faster, stronger," Ford said. "He's just a bull out there. He's a tremendous rebounder, a very competitive kid, very coachable, wants to win, and he's a finisher around the rim. He's one of those guys on the scouting report you have to pay attention to, and that opens up things for other players."

## Philly area players fuel unbeaten Tenn. State

Donald Hunt - Philadelphia Tribune - November 21, 2016

Tennessee State's basketball team is off to a sensational 4-0 start with all of its victories on the road. The Tigers are being led by two Philadelphia area basketball standouts Tahjere McCall and Jordan Reed.

McCall, a former Engineering and Science star, is averaging 15.5 points, 5.3 rebounds, 4.3 assists and 2.8 steals a game. The 6-foot-5, 195-pound redshirt senior, has the Tigers playing at a high level.

"We started off real good," McCall said. "We put in a lot of work during the summer. The hard work is really paying off. We have some good players on our team. I start at point guard. Then, I move to shooting guard and small forward depending on how the game is going. I do whatever it takes to help us win.

"It's great playing with Jordan. It's always good to have someone from the same town. You can relate. We have a common ground. We're on the same page."

Reed, a Wissahickon High product, is averaging 12.5 points and 7.5 rebounds a game. The 6-foot-4, 210-pound redshirt senior, has played a key role in Tennessee State's success. Reed has also formed a good combination with McCall.

"We're playing to our strength and that's defense," Reed said. "I play the three. I'm a defender. It's fun playing with Tahjere. He's also a good defender. He comes up with a lot of steals. I always have to be on alert. You never know when he's going to get a steal. When he gets a steal that's when I get out and fill the lane on the fastbreak."

Tennessee State has beaten UC Davis, Northern Arizona, Santa Clara and Middle Tennessee. All of these wins are on the road. A year ago, the Tigers finished with a 20-11 overall record, which included a trip to the CIT. McCall

feels the team should be very competitive in the Ohio Valley Conference. He believes the non-conference games should help TSU once conference play begins Dec. 31 against Murray State.

"We want to play well during the regular season," McCall said. "Our goal is to win the conference and get to the NCAA tournament. That's what we talk about."

Tennessee State is one of the nation's storied Black colleges. The Tigers have a rich basketball history, which includes Hall of Fame coach John McLendon and players Dick Barnett, John Barnhill, Leonard "Truck" Robinson, Lloyd Neal, Anthony Mason, Ben Waley and others. Reed is well aware of the school's basketball prowess.

"We know all about the history of basketball program," Reed said. "We've had all the alumni come back to the school like Dick Barnett. I know the history and proud to be a part of it."

Philadelphia 76ers small forward Robert Covington played his college basketball at Tennessee State. He's a part of the Tigers history. McCall has inspired by Covington playing in the NBA.

"He's showed me the way," McCall said. "I've talked to him a lot. I'm trying to get where he is."

McCall and Reed are making difference Tennessee State.

# TSU 72, CANISIUS 58: WHO'S THE EAST FAVORITE, AGAIN?

Catlin Bogard - OVCBall.net - November 23, 2016

Not to sound like PR notes, but in Tennessee State's entire Division I history, dating back to 1977, the Tigers had never been 5-0 to start the season. Even with their recent successes — 20 win seasons under former head coach John Cooper and current head coach Dana Ford, the Tigers hadn't even just won their first two games of the season since 2002.

That's not the case this season. And the "how" behind their spotless start is even more impressive than the feat itself.

Tennessee State has yet to play at the Gentry Center. They've traveled across the coast to California, where they won three games against teams all from much closer. They then flew back to Tennessee, beating the defending CUSA champion Middle Tennessee State Blue Raiders.

And then they hopped another flight, this time far to the north...

...where they thumped a Canisius team that another OVC contender, UT Martin, struggled with just two days prior.

Teams aren't supposed to fly thousands of miles and win games. They're not supposed to win three games on back-to-back-to-back nights two time zones over, and they're certainly not supposed to do all that without hitting 80 points one single time.

For the past few seasons, I've lamented the lack of defense in the OVC; decried how it's the reason the conference can't get those wins in March they once strung together over a four year period.

It's still early — but by all indicators, Tennessee State is bringing a dominant defense back...to a conference that's been defined in recent years by the flashy shooting of the Bruins, Racers, and for four days last March, Governors.

If you ask Ford, though — tonight didn't even fully show what this team is capable of.

"There were spurts where we didn't play necessarily well, but we played a lot of lineups today," Ford said after the win. "We haven't really practiced a lot lately because of the game schedule, traveling, and stuff like that. So we got a little sloppy."

Tennessee State used a 19-1 first-half run, holding Canisius without a field goal over a 7:59 span, and from there cruised to a 72-58 win over a young Griffs team. Canisius hit just 19-54 (35.2%) from the field, and 8-25 (32%) from three-point range in the loss.

While Ford doesn't give his team full credit for the Griffins poor shooting, it's part of a theme that's clearly emerged throughout the young season. The Tigers defense has held opponents to 43% shooting, 30% three-point shooting, and rank in the top 1/3 nationally in defensive rebounding over their five wins, while forcing more than 15 turnovers a game and blocking 13% of all shot attempts.

What makes it especially deadly is that the Tigers defense...is led by quite possibly their best offensive player.

"He's a coach's dream," Ford said. "He does turn the ball over, but he does steal it from the other team. And he's basically unguardable off the bounce."

A lot of OVC writers (even myself) pronounced Evan Bradds as the best player in the OVC during the offseason. There wasn't a doubt in anyone's mind who would be named the OVC preseason player of the year, and in our minds, no doubt who would be named to that same award at the end of the season.

Tahjere McCall might have something big to say about that.

McCall might not even have been the most impressive Tiger on the floor tonight. He scored a co-team high 14 points, and had six assists and four steals; but Wayne Martin had 14 points of his own, along with 14 rebounds. Jordan Reed was also in the double-double club, with 13 points and 11 rebounds. Delano Spencer came off the bench for 12 points of his own.

Tennessee State is talented. They're deep. And they play defense like no team I can remember since the 2011-12 Murray State Racers.

That's high praise, but one that's currently warranted.

For at least two years, I've been pleading, begging

that someone would bring back dominant defenses.

Tennessee State may just be the answer I'm looking for, and Belmont may be in for its toughest OVC fight yet.

Blame the sight-line? Both teams struggle from the free-throw line.

Canisius was a paltry 12-25 (48%) from the free-throw line in the loss, but Tennessee State wasn't a whole lot better, hitting 10-19 (52.6%) from the charity stripe. In tonight's edition of "weirdest stat I could find," TSU has benefited quite a lot from opposing teams free-throw struggles: Tigers' opponents are shooting just 57.5% from the charity stripe on the season. Three of those teams were playing in their home gym!

Tigers among most experienced teams in the nation

Another fun statistic for you: TSU's players average 2.27 years of experience, per KenPom, 28th most in the nation. With guys like McCall, Reed, and Martin all graduating this season — this has to be the year if TSU's going to break up the Bruins party.

But what about the Tigers SOS? You just wrote yesterday that they hadn't played anyone?

Well, yes and no. Canisius is 1-4...and they're likely not even sniffing an NCAA Tournament bid this year. But MTSU is a good win, and so are UC Davis and Santa Clara, especially given where both games were played. Other than the Blue Raiders, there's not really a great "benchmark" game on the Tigers' non-conference slate: a game against a team in that 90-150 RPI range, where good OVC teams often finish. Vanderbilt next Tuesday may be the closest: the Commodores currently rank 79th in KenPom, and they beat the Bruins by 14 earlier this year.

Of course, the Tigers start off conference season on December 31st with their only game against Murray State...in Murray. That will be a pretty good benchmark...

# Tennessee State rolls over Canisius

Paul Gotham - Pickin Splinters - November 23, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Reggie Witherspoon looked down the sideline and saw in an opponent what he wants from his Canisius Golden Griffins.

For now, the first-year Canisius coach will have to settle on using the Tennessee State Tigers as an example to follow.

Wayne Martin and Jordan Reed led four in double figures, and Tennessee State took the lead midway through the first half and never looked back in a 72-58 win Wednesday night at the Koessler Athletic Center.

"We got taught a lesson about grinding it out, about blue-collar basketball," Witherspoon said after the Griff's fourth loss of the season. "This was a team that exposed us when it came to that."

Seniors Martin (14 points, 14 rebounds) and Reed (13 points, 11 rebounds) paced Tennessee State which held Canisius without a field goal for eight-plus minutes as part of a 19-1 run to take a 40-27 lead into the locker room at half.

The Tigers, which host their home opener on Saturday, improved to 5-0 on the season.

"That's a good team we just played," Witherspoon stated. "We knew that coming in. They're an experienced bunch. They play extremely hard. They play unselfish. They defend. They really rebound."

Trailing by as many as six early in the contest, Tennessee State out rebounded Canisius 20-14 in the first half. The Tigers connected on four of eight 3-pointers during the first 20 minutes, while the Griff's attempted 17 shots from behind the arc hitting on five of those tries.

Tennessee State made 16 of 25 shots from the floor for the 13-point halftime advantage.

Tahjere McCall added 14 points, six assists and four steals for Tennessee State. McCall scored back-to-back buckets to give the Tigers their largest lead of the game. The redshirt senior hit a fall away jumper from the baseline and followed with a catch-and-shoot trey for a 38-22 Tiger advantage.

Reed's baseline drive kept the 16-point lead at 40-24.

"They just blew over us," Witherspoon added. "They all played hard. Our guys in their minds played hard. I'm not sure that they could imagine how hard they need to play right now. This team showed us how hard you will need to play. They played that hard the entire game. . . They fought for every loose ball. If we can learn from that, then maybe we can get better."

Tennessee State finished the game hitting 28 of 54 from the floor including 6 of 14 behind the arc. TSU converted 10 of 19 free-throw attempts.

Canisius connected on 19 of 54 field goals with several misses coming on layups from back-door attempts. The Griff's hit 8 of 25 three-point attempts and 12 of 25 from the charity stripe.

"Sometimes you're trying to get across to guys the importance of little things, but that's not what necessarily they want to think about," Witherspoon said referring to his players. "Free throws and layups go a long way, but it's not the most exciting element of the game sometimes for a player. We just got to keep working on it. We can't change from trying to get layups and free throws. We can't change from trying to block out. Hopefully, we learn from tonight, and our guys realize how important those little things are. Hopefully, we'll work at them, and try to get them better."

Freshman Isaiah Reese netted 13 second-half

points to lead the Golden Griffins.

Phil Valenti scored 12 on 5-of-10 shooting from the floor. The Canisius senior has reached double figures in 12 straight games dating back to last season.

Delano Spencer scored a dozen for Tennessee State.

The Golden Griffins finished with 18 assists on 19 made field goals.

"We knew that their assist number would be high," Tennessee State head coach Dana Ford said. "We wanted to keep all their baskets off those assists and not the drives and lane to the basket, use our size and rotate and make things difficult."

Tennessee State outscored Canisius 36-16 in the paint including 11-2 on second-chance points.

Led by Reese, the Canisius bench outscored their counterparts, 22-21.

Canisius (1-4) plays at Youngstown State on Saturday. A noon tip is scheduled.

# TSU gets new court in time for home opener

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - November 25, 2016

Tennessee State's men's basketball team will have the opportunity Saturday to extend its best start as an NCAA Division I team on a brand-new court.

The Tigers, who improved to 5-0 with a 72-58 win Wednesday at Canisius, will play their home opener against Reinhardt (7 p.m.) on a floor that was installed earlier this week.

"It's really nice to have our court back," said TSU coach Dana Ford. "To have it in time for our home opener is great."

TSU practiced on the new floor for the first time Friday.

The court at Gentry Center, which had been re-finished last year, was ruined by water damage in October just before the season began when lightning struck the roof, leaving a hole in the facility during a rainstorm.

A temporary floor was installed so that the men's and women's teams could practice. There was some uncertainty about how long it would take to put down a new floor.

Praters Hardwood Floors in Chattanooga took advantage of the men's team playing its first five games on the road.

After the women played Arkansas State last Saturday on the temporary floor Praters went to work on getting the new floor in place.

Both teams practiced at the gym in Keen Hall on campus while the floor was being replaced.

The TSU men were 11-3 at home last season.

"We had a good home record here last season, and that's another reason we're happy to have the court back in place," Ford said.

After Saturday's game TSU will play at Vander-

bilt on Tuesday, at Lipscomb on Dec. 3 and at North Carolina State on Dec. 10 before returning home Dec. 14 to play Alabama State.

The women's first time to play on the new court will be Dec. 14 against Fisk.



## Associated Press Top 25 Poll

November 28, 2016

### THE AP TOP TWENTY FIVE

The top 25 teams in The Associated Press' college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, records through Nov. 27, total points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and last week's ranking:

	Record	Prv
1. Kentucky (40)	6-0	1
2. Villanova (20)	6-0	2
3. North Carolina (4)	7-0	4
4. Kansas	5-1	5
5. Duke	6-1	6
6. Virginia	6-0	7
7. Xavier	6-0	9
8. Gonzaga	6-0	11
9. Baylor (1)	6-0	20
10. Creighton	6-0	12
11. UCLA	7-0	14
12. Saint Mary's (Cal)	5-0	15
13. Indiana	4-1	3
14. Louisville	5-1	10
15. Purdue	5-1	17
16. Arizona	5-1	8
17. Wisconsin	5-2	16
18. Butler	6-0	—
19. Iowa St.	5-1	21
20. South Carolina	6-0	—
21. Rhode Island	5-1	23
22. Syracuse	4-1	18
23. Oregon	4-2	13
24. Florida	6-1	—
25. West Virginia	4-1	19

Others receiving votes: Maryland 126, Notre Dame 85, Cincinnati 49, Michigan St. 28, Ohio St. 22, Michigan 13, Temple 8, Southern Cal 7, Houston 6, Florida St. 5, VCU 5, California 3, Tennessee St. 2, Virginia Tech 1, Minnesota 1, Arkansas St. 1, Colorado 1, Rutgers 1, San Diego St. 1.

USA TODAY TOP 25 POLL



# Vanderbilt hands Tennessee State its first loss

Chip Cirillo - Associated Press - November 29, 2016

NASHVILLE, TENN. - Getting benched in Thursday's loss to Butler might end up being one of the best things to happen to Matthew Fisher-Davis.

The junior guard has played well in the two games since, including a 22 point-effort on Tuesday night in Vanderbilt's 83-59 win which gave Tennessee State its first loss of the season.

"I got sat down against Butler and me and (assistant) coach (Roger) Powell went back to the hotel and probably had a two-and-a-half hour talk about basketball," Fisher-Davis said. "And then we started talking about life. . Ever since then I've had a completely different outlook and I've been at peace."

Fisher-Davis certainly looked peaceful, making 6 of 10 shots from the floor and 8 of 11 from the foul line at Memorial Gym.

Tennessee State (6-1), off to its best start since moving to Division I in 1977, fell to 1-36 against Southeastern Conference teams and 0-9 against Vanderbilt (4-3).

Vanderbilt's Jeff Roberson added 13 points and 7-foot-1 forward-center Luke Kornet and Riley LaChance both scored 12.

Freshman Payton Willis looked comfortable in his second game as a starter at point guard.

The Commodores went 10 of 23 from 3-point range and have made 25 3-pointers in the last two games.

"We have some excellent shooters and the hard part is getting them good looks," Commodores coach Bryce Drew said. "With Payton, when he can get the ball into the lane that helps us get some looks and then when Luke can collapse the defense and throws it out that gets us some good looks, too."

Ken'Darrius Hamilton led the Tigers with 19 points. Darreon Reddick added 12.

"We weren't us," Hamilton said. "That was just the only thing to it. We've got to get back to Tennessee State."

Vanderbilt outrebounded Tennessee State 39-20 and enjoyed a 22-9 advantage in second-chance points.

"Our biggest fear coming into the game was their size and that was the deciding factor because we've never been outrebounded by 19, which happened tonight," Tigers coach Dana Ford said. "Some of that is size and some of it is lack of attention to detail and willingness to box out when their shot goes up, which we'll try to fix starting tomorrow."

Tennessee State's Delano Spencer, who came off the bench to score a career-high 18 points in Saturday's win over Reinhardt, was held to six points.

TSU's Tahjere McCall (14. 5 ppg) fouled out with eight points and Wayne Martin (14 ppg) scored just five. Jordan Reed was also well below his average (12 ppg) with six points.

The Commodores broke a 7-all tie with a 10-2 run capped by Fisher-Davis' five straight points. Vanderbilt closed the first half with a 14-0 run, stretching its lead to 43-22 at halftime.

## BIG PICTURE

Tennessee State: The Tigers must regroup after their first loss and regain their offensive rhythm after shooting 41 percent from the floor.

Vanderbilt: The Commodores enter December with a little momentum, winning two consecutive games after solid outings by Fisher-Davis, Roberson, LaChance and Kornet.

## SOCIAL SPHERE

Memphis Grizzlies rookie Wade Baldwin, a former Vanderbilt point guard, tweeted "Mathew Fisher-Davis is the best shooter in the entire NCAA" late in the first half.

## HOT 3-POINT SHOOTER

LaChance went 4 for 6 from 3-point range, making him 18 of 26 for a 69.2 percent clip in the last four games. He has played shooting guard, his best position, the past two games.

"When Matt's got it going (from 3-point range), guys definitely help off me and other guys a lot so when he gets shots like that he definitely gets other guys open shots," LaChance said of Fisher-Davis, who hit two 3-pointers.

## UP NEXT

Tennessee State visits Lipscomb, another Nashville opponent, on Saturday before heading to North Carolina State on Dec. 10.

Vanderbilt plays Minnesota (6-1) in Sioux Falls, S.D., on Saturday before returning home to face High Point on Dec. 6. High Point (4-3) rallied from a 20-point deficit during the final 10 minutes to edge Morgan State on Monday.

# Vanderbilt wins matchup of promising Nashville coaches

Adam Sparks - The Tennessean - November 29, 2016

Vanderbilt's Bryce Drew was too promising of a coach to keep away from Nashville. Tennessee State's Dana Ford may be too good to stay.

The promising young coaches have plenty in common, and they left Memorial Gym in the same mood Tuesday night — though from opposite ends of the scoreboard.

"I'm proud of our guys. Since our last home game we have really improved," said Drew, whose Vanderbilt squad won 83-59 over Ford's TSU team in front of 8,445 at Memorial Gym.

"I have never been so happy," Ford said. "We are 6-1 and getting votes in the Top 25."

Vanderbilt (4-3) got a hard-fought win over a formidable crosstown foe for the second time in Drew's debut season. Two weeks ago, the Commodores outlasted veteran coach Rick Byrd's Belmont squad 80-66.

Matthew Fisher-Davis scored 22 points, just five days after he was benched by Drew for the entire second half in a loss to Butler. After the win over TSU, Fisher-Davis candidly said his back-to-back strong games came after a two-and-a-half hour conversation with assistant coach Roger Powell following the benching.

"We talked about life, and eventually I ended up giving my life to God that night," said Fisher-Davis, who has 36 points in the past two games. "Ever since then, I have had a completely different outlook. I have been at peace."

TSU (6-1) suffered its first loss, snapping the program's best start since moving to Division I in the 1977-78 season. The Tigers received two votes in the Associated Press Top 25 this week, but they couldn't knock off an SEC opponent for only the second time in their history.

"We have to keep things in perspective. We are getting votes in the Top 25 because Tennessee

State has never been 6-0, and people notice it," Ford said. "Do I think we are a good team? Yes. Do I think we're one of the top 25 teams in the country? No.

"... But now we have a program in a position where it is going to consistently win, especially at our level."

It was still a missed opportunity for TSU. Ken'Darrius Hamilton had 19 points, but leading scorer Tahjere McCall (14.5 ppg) had only one field goal while toiling in foul trouble most of the night.

Drew and Ford have crossed paths briefly in the past, but they could compare notes on plenty of common ground these days. Though separated by a decade — Drew is 42 and Ford is 32 — both are seen as rising young stars in their profession.

Both cut their teeth in the mid-major ranks. Drew played for and coached under his dad, renowned coach Homer Drew, at Valparaiso. Ford earned his stripes under Gregg Marshall at Winthrop and Wichita State and Dan Muller at Illinois State.

And both know what it's like to hold a spot on the head coaching hot list. Drew took Valparaiso to two NCAA Tournaments and two NITs to land the Vanderbilt job — one of many he could've accepted last spring.

Ford, the second-youngest coach in Division I, has rebuilt the TSU roster and taken the Tigers from a 5-26 mark two seasons ago to 20-11 last season, when he earned Ohio Valley Conference coach of the year.

If TSU can keep Ford on campus and away from other jobs beyond this season, it would be a bonus. Drew has been in that spot before.

"Dana is doing a tremendous job at TSU," Drew

said. "He's got good players, and good players really really help. When I was going through those processes, we had really good players (at Valparaiso) and they were making that process happen. (TSU is) going to win a lot of games."

# TSU beats Lipscomb on Tajhere McCall jumper

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - December 3, 2016

After making only one of his first 12 shots, Tennessee State's Tajhere McCall sank a jumper over two defenders with 8.4 seconds left, lifting the Tigers to a 72-71 win over Lipscomb at Allen Area Saturday afternoon.

Lipscomb's Nathan Moran missed an open 3-pointer from the top of the key at the buzzer as the Bisons (3-7) suffered their sixth loss in seven games.

TSU, ranked No. 17 in the CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25 poll, improved to 7-1. The Tigers only loss had come in their last game Tuesday at Vanderbilt (83-59).

Lipscomb rallied from a 56-43 deficit with 12:57 remaining and took a 71-70 lead on a free throw by former Franklin standout Garrison Mathews with 1:06 remaining.

The Bisons missed a chance to go up by four when Eli Pepper missed a 3-pointer from deep in the corner with 20.3 seconds remaining.

McCall then brought the ball down court and after being unable to find an open teammate took the shot from near the 3-point line himself.

Wayne Martin led TSU with 16 points and also had 12 rebounds.

Mathews led Lipscomb with 19 points and Rob Marberry, a transfer from Western Kentucky and former Franklin Road Academy star, scored 17.

It was TSU's second consecutive win over Lipscomb. The Tigers beat the Bisons 89-86 last year at Gentry Center, and McCall was the key player in that win as well. He scored 31 points, including 25 in the second half.

Ford denied timeout: TSU coach Dana Ford tried to call a timeout after McCall brought the ball

across half court with 15 seconds remaining, but couldn't because of a new NCAA rule that states coaches can't call timeouts. The coach can signal to a player and the player must call the timeout. The problem for Ford was that McCall never saw him signaling. In the end, Ford was glad McCall didn't see him.

"I was calling timeout and the referee said, 'I can't give you a timeout,' and McCall goes and drives and shoots a fadeaway over two people and makes it," Ford said. "I'm glad that they put that new rule in."

Even though McCall had missed 11 of his first 12 shots, Ford said he still would have likely called a play that left him as the shooter.

"I don't know who else we would put the ball in their hands," Ford said. "He's our best player. He doesn't have to be your best shooter to get the ball to him."

Tigers rely on balance: Not only did TSU have six players who scored in double figures, they had three finish with double-doubles. That included Martin, Jordan Reed (11 points, 14 rebounds) and McCall (10 points, 11 rebounds). The Tigers outrebounded Lipscomb 50-34.

Up next: TSU travels to North Carolina State on Saturday (3 p.m.). Lipscomb plays Belmont Tuesday at Allen Arena (6:30 p.m.). The Bisons lost to Belmont 64-62 on Tuesday.

# Tennessee State's Dana Ford thriving as college basketball's youngest coach

Scott Gleeson - USA Today - December 9, 2016

At 32, Dana Ford falls short of being a millennial, for better or worse.

But the youngest head coach in college basketball feels like he has an inside edge of reaching his millennial players at Tennessee State.

"Being on the tail end of that generation, I definitely feel more in the loop with how to get to these guys faster," said Ford, last season's Ohio Valley Conference coach of the year. "As a head coach, I realize that sometimes it's not just about what I'm saying, but how I'm saying it and who I'm saying it with. It's how I relate to them. Being a younger coach, it's easier for me to tap into what they're going through because that was me not too long ago."

Not too long ago, Ford was a player at Illinois State specializing in defense. He started his coaching career as a graduate assistant under Gregg Marshall at Winthrop before moving with Marshall at Wichita State, where Ford went onto recruit two-time All-American guard Fred VanVleet. After assistant jobs at Chipola (Fla.) Junior College, Tennessee State and back to Wichita State, Ford returned to his alma mater, coaching the Redbirds under current coach Dan Muller for two seasons.

In 2014, at 29, Ford got the call to take over a woeful program in need of a revitalization. Last year Ford quietly spearheaded the program to one of the best turnarounds in Division I history — going from 5-26 in 2014-15 to 20-11. This season, Ford has the Tigers (7-1) rolling. They're off to their best start since prior to joining D-I in 1977-78.

"I've taken something different from each coach I've been with and implemented that into our program," Ford said. "With Gregg Marshall at Wichita, it's holding players accountable. With John Cooper at Tennessee State (from 2009-11), he taught me the importance of being a good family man because at the end

of the day the players are watching you being a good husband and father. And at Illinois State, Dan Muller taught me the importance of building relationships with players. You can have a vision and the best culture, but if you don't have those personal relationships with guys it means nothing."

When Ford arrived in Nashville, his first season was as tough as they come; he had one returning player and in turn needed to add 12 players in eight weeks. That forced him to turn to transfers and freshmen and simply trudge through 2014-15. Granted, it is a long season, but nevertheless The Tigers' fast start is success that the program needs desperately.

In Year 3 of the reclamation project, Ford believes his team can contend in the Ohio Valley in pursuit of transforming into a March Madness darling like say, Middle Tennessee, last season's Cinderella the Tigers beat this season. The rest of their non-conference slate will prep them well for that, with upcoming matchups at North Carolina State (Saturday) and then at Duke (Dec. 19).

"We wanted to get to a place where in our conference we consistently compete against everyone, and we wanted to play against the best competition," Ford said. "We're transitioning to a point where we can expect to win."

"The biggest thing we emphasize with this program is character. Bad character can drive a team down, and good character can drive a team up. The most talented player in the world could have bad character, and we wouldn't want him."

The Tigers start three fifth-year seniors — elite guard Tahjere McCall (13.1 points, 6.0 rebounds and 4.5 assists per game), double-double machine forward Wayne Martin (13.1 ppg, 10.0 rpg) and guard Jordan Reed (11.1 ppg, 8.1 rpg). All three transferred from

other programs to play for Ford.

"Our goal is to be relentless in getting better," Ford said. "In order for them to peak in March, they have to pay attention to detail. We can't get complacent. I believe in consistently re-inventing ourselves."

Ford, who credits his success to associate coach, Randy Peele — a former head coach who has led two different Big South teams (UNC Greensboro and Winthrop) to the NCAA tournament — has re-invented himself on a regular-day basis as such a young coach, he concedes. And he certainly prefers his head coaching duties over assistant duties.

"This is such a perfect place to cut your teeth into head coach," said Ford. "Our league allows me to not be overwhelmed and learn on the fly. So while the players are growing, I'm growing, too."

# Tahjere McCall is the catalyst for dangerous Tennessee State

Torrance Jones - Mid-Major Madness - December 11, 2016

It wasn't easy for Tennessee State.

Saturday's game in Reynolds Coliseum was the first played by the NC State men since the renovation of the historic arena. Wolfpack nation was in full force, loud and proud in what was dubbed a heritage game.

On the visitor's side, a veteran point guard wearing a white headband embraced the electricity of the moment.

Tahjere McCall and Tennessee State looked to add their own piece to the Wolfpack heritage: play spoiler and get the program's first win against an ACC opponent.

Despite coming up short in overtime, the Tigers showed they belonged.

Behind its defense, led by reigning OVC defensive POY McCall, Tennessee State had NC State on the ropes in the first ever meeting between the teams.

McCall began his career at Niagara and transferred to Tennessee State after his sophomore year. After sitting out a year, the point guard has become Tigers' catalyst.

This was on display against NC State. In one sequence, McCall gave his team momentum on a no-look pass that led to a monster dunk by Christian Mekowulu shortly before halftime. While his impact won't always show up in the box score, his toughness resembles his hometown of Philadelphia.

He brings focus, energy and passion that fuels the Tigers. His coach talked about his impact after the game.

"He's really helped change our program, he's such a winner, he's very competitive, he plays extremely hard, has a very high basketball I.Q., awesome kid, great student," Dana Ford said.

Not only does he do all the little things on the floor, his true leadership is shown in timeouts, in between free throws and on the bench. He's an effective communicator.

Early in the game a heated exchange between both teams led to technical fouls called on a player from each team. The following timeout, McCall spoke with a ref, calmly came over to the bench and had words with a teammate to settle the situation.

McCall and Tennessee State have nothing to hang their heads over even though overtime didn't go their way. With McCall at the helm, the Tigers are going to be a tough team come conference play.

Mark Gottfried had high praise.

"I have a hard time seeing anybody in that league playing with that team, that's a good basketball team," the NC State coach said after the game.

One reason is clearly McCall.

"He's just a coach's dream. We wouldn't be where we are today had it not been for him," Ford said. "Things kind of start and kind of end with him."

McCall and the Tigers play Alabama State Dec. 14, before playing in another historic gym - Cameron Indoor - against Duke on Dec. 19.

# Wolfpack survives Tennessee State with 67-55 overtime win

Joe Giglio - The News & Observer (Raleigh) - December 10, 2016

Tennessee State reprised the role of Wofford, a veteran mid-major team eager to spoil N.C. State's return to Reynolds Coliseum, to near perfection on Saturday.

Like Wofford did two years ago, a tough, determined Tennessee State team had N.C. State down and almost out. The Tigers led by as many as eight points in the second half.

But senior forward BeeJay Anya and freshman guard Dennis Smith Jr. wouldn't let N.C. State leave the renovated Old Barn without a win. Anya's near triple-double and Smith's 19 points lifted the Wolfpack to a 67-55 overtime win over Tennessee State.

Anya, who had a total of eight points in the previous five games combined, scored 12 points and had 14 rebounds and seven blocked shots.

When the Tigers (7-2) were in control of the game and threatened to duplicated Wofford's win here in December 2014, the last game before the on-campus arena underwent a \$35 million renovation, it was Anya who held down the fort.

He rebounded, he protected the rim and he made free throws (6-of-11).

"The guy affected the game in just about every way," N.C. State coach Mark Gottfried said.

Or to put it in more plain terms, as Anya did, he wasn't going to be "punked" by the physical Tigers, who got 16 points and nine rebounds from senior forward Wayne Martin.

"They kind of came in here and thought they could punk us," Anya said. "I ain't no punk."

No, the big man is not that, even though he has played sparingly recently and his time figures to get chopped up more when freshman

forward Omer Yurtseven makes his debut on Thursday against Appalachian State.

Anya, who played a total of 33 minutes in the previous four games, logged 38 minutes on Saturday. By the end of the overtime, when it was clear the Wolfpack would improve to 15-1 in its return games to its former home, the sell-out crowd of 5,500 was chanting his name.

Anya appreciated the love.

"I have started off slow this season," Anya said. "I had a little stretch there where I wasn't playing very well. It's good to know the fans still have my back."

And while Anya took care of the boards and blocked shots, Smith heated up at the end of regulation and in overtime. The freshman guard scored seven of his 19 points in overtime.

His running baseline shot with 46.4 seconds left tied the score at 50. Smith then blocked a shot on Tennessee State's next trip down the floor, and the Wolfpack came up with a jump ball.

Smith had a chance to win the game at the end of regulation, but Martin blocked his layup attempt with 1.0 second left.

When Martin fouled out 18 seconds into overtime, the Tigers were in trouble. Anya made one of two free throws on the foul and then a steal and layup by Smith gave the Wolfpack a 53-50 lead.

The Tigers took the lead back after a runner by Tahjere McCall and a 3-pointer by Darreon Reddick to make it 55-53.

Senior guard Terry Henderson (game-high 21 points) answered Reddick's 3 with one of his own. Henderson's 3 actually banked in from an odd angle for the 56-55 lead at 2:55 in over-

time.

"I think the Reynolds magic guided that bank shot in on the 3-ball," Henderson said. "It was a great atmosphere. I wish we could play more games here, honestly, but it is what it is."

Gottfried praised the crowd as well. He was equally impressed with Tennessee State.

"I have a hard time seeing anybody in that league play with that team," Gottfried said. "That's a good basketball team."

Almost good enough to hand N.C. State a second straight loss at Reynolds, but the Wolfpack didn't let history repeat itself.



# Duke could unveil another weapon against Tennessee State

Associated Press - December 18, 2016

DURHAM, N.C. -- Duke reached this segment of the season with the notion that it will be a recharged team.

And perhaps reloading as well.

The fifth-ranked Blue Devils have been idle for more than a week for final exams but return to action Monday night against Tennessee State. This has been one of the potential targeted dates for the debut of heralded forward Harry Giles, the most coveted recruit in the freshman class. He has been out since a surgical procedure in September, with the Blue Devils willing to bring him along at a conservative pace.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski said mid-December was a logical time to consider that Giles might be ready for game action.

Duke (10-1) has won eight games in a row but hasn't played since demolishing UNLV 94-55 on Dec. 10.

Junior guard Grayson Allen scored a career-high 34 points in the game against UNLV, a rather premature outburst in some respects because he has been dealing with an array of ailments.

"I think over the exam period is a time where, and then maybe Christmas, where we can get him closer to 100 percent and then hopefully work these guys in a little bit," Krzyzewski said.

Freshman Jayson Tatum has averaged 15 points and seven rebounds in the three games he has played for the Blue Devils since a pre-season foot injury. Post player Marques Bolden also has played in three games in a more limited capacity.

"Everyone has to be able to contribute and help us, but right now I think we can smile a little bit and be happy that we got some of our guys back," Duke forward Amile Jefferson said.

Sophomore guard Luke Kennard leads Duke in scoring at 20 points per game.

As more players become available, it will be a juggling act of sorts as Krzyzewski has two games remaining before the Atlantic Coast Conference schedule kicks in.

"We've got to keep finding minutes for these guys," Krzyzewski said. "We've got to put this thing together while we're playing games."

This game marks Duke's only home outing during a five-game stretch. This is the last nonconference home as the Blue Devils try to tack one more on their NCAA-best 131 home out-of-conference winning streak.

This is the third of four road games this month for Tennessee State (8-2).

Tigers coach Dana Ford said it's obvious Duke has a special operation.

"I think they are the best team in America," Ford said. "... Everything is first class. They're champions. You don't even have to know people inside the program to tell what you are dealing with."

Tennessee State is off to an 8-2 start for the second season in a row. However, the Tigers are winless in nine previous meetings against teams in the ACC.

That includes a 67-55 overtime loss on Dec. 10 at North Carolina State. Since then, the Tigers whipped Alabama State 68-46, allowing only 13 first-half points.

This will be the first meeting between Tennessee State and Duke. The Tigers are 1-33 all time against Top 25 opponents in Division I.

"We'll try to put together the best game plan available to give our guys the best chance to

go out there and win the next game," Ford said. "We are just very appreciative, our entire university, our program and our alums, that we are going to have the opportunity to play at Cameron Indoor Stadium against a first-class program."

# Kennard, No. 5 Duke top Tennessee St 65-55 in Giles' debut

Joedy McCreary - Associated Press - December 19, 2016

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Duke finally had all the players that made the Blue Devils the top-ranked team in the preseason — except that, for most of the night, they didn't play like it.

Luke Kennard scored 24 points and No. 5 Duke beat Tennessee State 65-55 on Monday in the college debut of touted freshman Harry Giles.

Freshman forward Jayson Tatum added 14 points and Grayson Allen finished with 12 for the Blue Devils (11-1), who plodded through 30 mostly sluggish minutes before pulling away from a pesky Tigers team that threatened to spoil a big night for Giles.

"This game was a learning experience for us," Kennard said. "We can't take anything for granted. We've got to play each and every game like it's the biggest game of the year. . . . I just don't think we were really ready to play. . . . Our energy wasn't there, our enthusiasm wasn't there, and we just didn't really have one guy that's bringing us all the energy, and we really needed that tonight."

Tennessee State led 36-34 on Wayne Martin's jumper with 15 minutes left. Duke countered with a 25-3 run highlighted by five 3-pointers — including two by Kennard on consecutive possessions after he was left completely unguarded — to take a 59-39 lead.

Darreon Reddick and Tahjere McCall scored 14 points apiece for the Tigers (8-3).

Amile Jefferson had a career-best 18 rebounds for Duke, which finally got Giles on the floor for the first time. One of the nation's top recruits, he missed his senior season in high school with torn knee ligaments in his right knee and then missed the first 11 games at Duke after having his left knee scoped in October.

"First game, that was just shaking the rust off and getting the kinks out," Giles said. "I think

each day, each game, each practice, I'll get better."

## BIG PICTURE

Tennessee State: This was the second time in nine days that the Tigers threw a scare into the host team at an historic Atlantic Coast Conference venue, after taking North Carolina State to overtime in the Wolfpack's first game at renovated Reynolds Coliseum. Tennessee State's three losses have all come on the road against Power 5 programs, with the other defeat coming at Vanderbilt.

"Hopefully, we realized that if we play as a team, we currently feel like we can play with anybody in the country, but we need to try to get to the point where we can consistently beat high-level teams," coach Dana Ford said.

Duke: The impact of Giles' return went far beyond his meager line in the boxscore — no points, no rebounds, and 0-for-1 shooting in 4 first-half minutes. For the first time, the Blue Devils had the full complement of star freshmen that made them No. 1 in the preseason polls.

But Duke shot a season-worst 37 percent and finished just 19 of 32 from the free throw line while establishing a season-low scoring total by 10 points. The previous low was 75, both in the loss to Kansas and the win against Rhode Island.

"We're in October, not December, with our team," coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

## STAT SHEET

Kennard has scored 20 or more points in four of his last five games. . . . Jefferson was averaging 17.8 points and 12.3 rebounds during his last four games. His rebounding numbers went up but his scoring numbers fell — he finished

with five points on 2-of-7 shooting and was just 1 for 8 from the foul line.

## HARRY CHRISTMAS

All eyes were on Giles, who made his long-awaited Duke debut when he checked in during a timeout with 11:27 left in the first half with the crowd chanting his first name. Those chants died down, then picked back up when the Blue Devils broke the huddle. He clearly isn't in game shape yet, and his only shot — a jumper from the right wing over Ken'Darrius Hamilton in his first 15 seconds on the floor — was way too strong.

## UP NEXT

Tennessee State: The Tigers have eight days before their next game, a home date with Division III Covenant on Dec. 27.

Duke: The Blue Devils play Elon on Wednesday night at the Greensboro Coliseum.

# TSU looks like tournament team in loss to Duke

David Bocclair - Nashville Post - December 20, 2016

In its first visit to Cameron Indoor Stadium, Tennessee State looked like it belonged.

The Tigers lost 65-55 to No. 5 Duke — and in front of the legendary program's always-boisterous fans — but trailed by just four at half-time and led on six different occasions.

TSU's largest advantage was five points (19-14), with 6:47 to play in the first half. The Tigers' last lead was 36-34 after Wayne Martin's jump shot with 15:03 remaining.

"I'm very proud of how hard our guys continued to fight, and we just have to try to learn from this," coach Dana Ford said. "Hopefully we realize that if we play as a team, we currently feel like we can play with anybody in the country. But we're trying to get to the point where we can consistently compete against high-level teams.

"Our goal is to win our conference and play in the NCAA Tournament."

They made believers out of one notable observer.

"They're a very good basketball team," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "They'll have a chance at winning their conference. I told our guys this was the kind of opponent that you face in the NCAA Tournament — [experienced], really well-coached team — and they play defense and rebound. In other words, the two things they do best are play defense and rebound."

TSU (8-3) held Duke (11-1) to 37.3 percent shooting from the floor and was outrebounded by just two, 27-25. The Blue Devils took control with a 25-3 second-half run that created a 20-point spread. The Tigers managed to cut that in half by the end of the game.

"I think it was a really good game until that

one span," TSU guard Tahjere McCall said. "... They took off. I'm proud of how we played and didn't give up. That's always a good thing. It just shows that we can play with a lot of teams in the country.

"Now we just have to get to a point, like Coach (Ford) said, where we can win these games."

# Harry Giles merely teases in his highly anticipated Duke debut: 3 Things to Know

Matt Norlander - CBS Sports - December 20, 2016

The most anticipated college hoops debut in a long time wound up being nothing but a tease.

On Monday night Duke freshman Harry Giles, who was at one point considered the best choice for No. 1 pick for the 2017 NBA Draft, finally stepped on the floor for the first time in a Duke uniform.

He didn't last long.

Fifth-ranked Duke (11-1) defeated a good mid-major foe, 8-3 Tennessee State, to the tune of 65-55. The irony was how quickly Giles' debut became a backburner story. While he was getting his legs under him, Tennessee State was giving Duke its toughest first-half challenge at Cameron Indoor in a long time.

## Three Things to Know

### 1. Everyone needs to be patient with Giles

Giles logged just four minutes Monday night, all of them in the first half. He attempted (and missed) one field goal and didn't log a rebound, assist, block, steal, any of it. This was a ginger introduction to college basketball. But it was also an important one. Just getting Giles fully healthy and cleared for competition could be the final, vital step for Duke's goal of becoming the most dominant team in a most dominant season of college hoops.

I won't make much of Giles' debut because there's not much to make of it. He hasn't played organized basketball in more than 400 days. Giles tore his ACL mere minutes into the first game of his senior season of high school. Mike Krzyzewski should and is making sure Giles doesn't do too much too soon. He'll play again Wednesday in Duke's game against Elon.

### 2. Luke Kennard to the rescue again

Duke was taking some punches from Tennessee State, and then the ridiculous run came and suddenly it was 47-36 Duke after a 13-0

run. The game was done at that point. Guess why? Luke Kennard showed up. He continued his Player of the Year campaign with a game-high 24 points. Amile Jefferson had 18 boards for Duke.

Kennard is now averaging nearly 21 points, and it's looking like the offense is built to go through him in times of crisis. That is something no one in the universe thought would be the case as recently as four weeks ago.

By the way, Duke has won 132 straight games at Cameron Indoor against non-conference opponents.

### 3. Tennessee State absolutely could break brackets in March

Duke was held to 27 points in the first half and only led by four points. It was the first time since Ohio State in 2012 that Duke failed to hit 30 points by halftime at Cameron Indoor Stadium in a non-conference game. The Blue Devils had just 15 points at the five-minute mark of the first half. They trailed with nearly 16 minutes remaining in the game.

For 32-year-old coach Dana Ford, his Tennessee State team did something a lot of ACC opponents aren't going to do in that building this year. Before Monday night the fewest points Duke scored in a game this season: 75. I wonder if Duke will be held under 70 again this season in that building.

Tennessee State did it, though, and helped the game to 13 lead changes. Not bad. If anything, it was close enough that Krzyzewski didn't fool around with Giles. With the game that close. Tennessee State is going to push Belmont to be the best team in the Ohio Valley. Either of those teams will have a good chance at upsetting a 3 or 4 seed when the time comes.

Ford and Co. almost beat NC State on Dec. 10, ultimately losing in OT by two points. It gave

Duke a good game. It's given quality mid-major Middle Tennessee a home loss, maybe the only one MTSU takes this season. Remember the Tigers, because you could well see them again a few months from now.

# Hard-Charging Tigers Fall 76-73

Andrew Force - OVCHoops.com - January 3, 2017

Monday night Kennesaw State held off a furious comeback from the hosting Tennessee State Tigers.

It started slow and ended slow. The true fervor of the Tennessee State (9-5, 0-1) versus Kennesaw State (6-10) game occurred midway through the second half.

With 14:22 to play Head Coach Dana Ford implemented a fullcourt press. The results were undeniable.

"We feel as though we shouldn't lose to any team we play," said Tahjere McCall. "When a team comes out and smacks us in the mouth like they did you have to draw the line somewhere. Coach Ford told us, we have to change something."

TSU instantly forced a turnover. Shortly thereafter they deflected two passes and forced another. Three consecutive possessions ended in turnovers for the visiting Kennesaw State Owls.

With 12:49 left Jordan Jones smashed a dunk on two defensive rebounders, infusing the visitors with pride, ending a modest 4-0 Tiger run. From that point forward the Tigers snatched the driver's seat. Racing up the floor McCall finished challenged layup after challenged layup. Wayne Martin really helped out during the run, finishing with 20 points on 9 of eleven shooting.

He scored 13 points after the break. Martin is averaging 17 ppg since Christmas.

With the defensive pressure ratcheted up, TSU trudged to the hill's top and peaked over at 62-61, only to be knocked back down.

A pair of Nick Masterson three-pointers pushed KSU back ahead, 67-62 with 2:27 left.

McCall missed a free throw on the ensuing possession. He would miss a critical opportunity to square the game later, as well.

After Masterson's pair of triples the visiting Owls only needed good free shooting and reliable ball-handling to close it out. They got spotty shooting and good dribbling.

Regardless, a protracted free throw parade, and the game, ended with a Darreon Reddick 20' offering. It fell short and left off the rim.

## Defensive Breakdowns

The Tigers faltered early defensively. Everyone accepted personal responsibility after the loss. Owl Nick Masterson scored the first six points for Kennesaw State.

"I felt like it got off to a hot start and we usually make teams work harder for their baskets," said Jordan Reed. "Number 21 (Masterson) got hot early. I take fault for that."

The reigning OVC Defensive Player of the Year was displeased with Kendrick Ray's 20 points. Ray shot 7-16 from the floor and 4-10 from deep.

"He definitely got to us today," said McCall. "I feel like I am big reason for that. I don't like the other team's leading scorer doing that. I got to really strap it on."

Coach Ford also willfully took the blame for the loss, citing his personnel decisions.

"I got to do a better job with our defensive gameplan," said Coach Ford. "I have to do a better job of putting the right guys in there."

Christian Mekowulu earned his first start since a debilitating ACL-injury fall 2016.

Coach Ford decided to start Mekowulu after

growing disillusioned by Ken'Darrius Hamilton's rebounding and defense of late.

Overall Tennessee State intends to return to their core principles.

"We have to get back to what we do, defense and rebounding," said McCall.

Neither regular Samson Oyediran nor Xavier Williams played, buried on the depth chart.

Tennessee State hosts Southeast Missouri Thursday night and UT Martin Saturday evening. A two game road trip follows.

# A Burst of Chaney Invigorates Tennessee State

Andrew Force - OVCHoops.com - January 8, 2017

A mercurial Tennessee State(11-5, 2-1) unit sent UT Martin back home 0-Nashville. TSU won 76-65.

The Nashville swing ain't what it used to be, now that Head Coach Dana Ford has TSU defending at a championship level.

The victory was hardly routine, as UT Martin (11-8, 1-3) stomped on the Tigers' tail early. Vitalized by active defense the Skyhawks galloped out to a 21-9 lead.

"We were just dialed in," said UT Martin Head Coach Anthony Stewart. "We were communicating. We were energetic. Our arms were up. Guys were sliding. They were taking charges." They didn't keep it up.

TSU point guard Armani Chaney made an important difference in the game. He pushed the lethargic Tigers up the floor, and twice set up teammates. If A'Torey Everett converted a six-foot baseline floater to beat the halftime buzzer, Chaney would have added another assist.

"I was just trying to be very aggressive for the team," said Chaney. "I was trying to get everybody involved."

Chaney brought an infusion of speed and quick thinking to a stagnating offense.

"When he comes in it brings a different pace," said Tahjere McCall. "He is good in traffic, getting in cracks."

Late in the first half fans saw a slick stretch from McCall. First he fed a tip-pass to Jordan Reed. Two possessions later he slashed into the paint with a crafty sidestep. When McCall is scoring the Tigers are a top-tier OVC club. Without him they look strained in the halfcourt.

Chaney missed his first two outside shots, but his third attempt gave Tennessee State a necessary 7-0 run. The sizable hole was almost completely filled in and manageable.

"Our energy died down," said UT Martin Coach Stewart. "We should have gone in with a bigger lead before halftime."

Chaney's triple cut it to 30-26 late in the first.

"I thought he was absolutely awesome and that is why he started the second half," said Head Coach Dana

Ford. "He struggled a little bit this year with his shot. He made a big shot for us late in the half."

Chaney can blitz right by tired legs, and coming off the bench gives him an opportunity to instantly attack. His speed and vision are unique among the Tigers.

"He is a really good player," said Coach Ford. "He puts a lot of pressure on himself. We love him to death. He really makes us a better team."

Hot Hands

I knew they would regroup, gameplan, and scheme. They did. Their defensive intensity picked up and we didn't respond like we should have in the second half."

UT Martin guard Jacolby Mobley again battled a finicky right ankle. He missed five games with the injury earlier in the year.

At one point, as he sat on the court aching, Mobley shouted, "Coach, I'm through."

The frustration of sitting, healing, coming back, injuring it again just drained his spirit. But he returned a minute later.

"He is not quite 100%," said Coach Stewart. "He is a senior. He is a warrior. He is a competitor and he is giving everything he has."

For TSU Christian Mekowulu again impressed with his enhanced mobility. Like a sprite, the big man recovered to block a jumper.

When Wayne Martin was unable to corral the ball UT Martin can back instantly. Mekowulu leaned aggressively, nearly toppling over to deflect the incisive pass. A block, a save, and a steal in a matter of seconds. Weeks ago Mekowulu could not have executed such an athletic series of plays.

"He was awesome tonight," said Head Coach Ford. "It was a total team effort. His game was the epitome of that. I don't think he scored a basket, but he defended. He rebounded. He rebounded out of his area. He rebounded above the rim. He came up with loose balls, deflected balls, defended ball screens really well."

Coach Ford was pleased that Mekowulu kept grinding

despite not starting the second half.

Jordan Reed's defensive lapses are starting to become a tradition. The powerful guard loses track of his man at least twice a game. Most of the time the open man hits a three-pointer as he helplessly recognizes the lapse.

McCall was the soul of the team. Again.

"His number one role is leadership," said Head Coach Ford. "If he is not going to lead us, then we are not going anywhere."

Tahj pulled down two offensive rebounds in the same possession. Possibly because he missed a bunny, McCall yanked down two offensive rebounds on the successive possession too.

Delano Spencer dropped consecutive three-pointers midway through the second half. The perfect super sub showing, Spencer fought through a first-half benching and collected his emotions.

"That is why we brought him here to make some shots," said Coach Ford. "Last year we had a guy named Marcus Roper, whose job it was to make shots. This year that is supposed to be Delano Spencer."

Spencer missed a game with an injury, and is still acclimating to the offense, but found his spots Saturday night.

Spencer gave a third three to the cause to beat the shot clock with 3:58 left in the game. It opened up an 11-point lead for TSU.

"This is his third or fourth game in which he has made five three's," said Coach Ford. "He makes us a better team. Now you are talking about a guy that can get us 12-13 points off the bench."

Four TSU players scored double figures in the second half alone (McCall, Spencer, Darreon Reddick, Wayne Martin).

Tennessee State captured back-to-back wins for the first time since Thanksgiving. UT Martin dropped their fifth game in seven outings. They host Southeast Missouri next Saturday.



# Jugovic helps Tennessee Tech beat TSU in overtime

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - January 19, 2017

Aleksa Jugovic scored Tennessee Tech's first 11 points in overtime and finished with a career-high 30 in the Golden Eagles' 80-74 win Thursday night over Tennessee State at Gentry Center.

Tech (8-13, 4-2 OVC) had allowed the Tigers (12-7, 3-3) to claw their way back late in regulation, and Jugovic, a junior from Serbia, took it upon himself to get the momentum back on the Golden Eagles' side.

"We had a chance to win the game in regulation so when we went into the overtime I think it was more in their advantage," Jugovic said. "We didn't give up, we didn't lose our focus. To get the team going again I felt like I needed to make some shots early in overtime."

Jugovic made a four-point play to put the Golden Eagles up 70-69 in overtime and then a three-point play that put them up 73-70. They never trailed again.

Catching fire late: Jugovic scored 18 of Tech's final 27 points.

When TSU made the 6-foot-3 guard the focus of its defense, he ended up being fouled several times and made the best of his opportunities at the free throw line where he was 11 of 11.

"He's a great shooter," said TSU guard Tahjere McCall. "It's hard when he's coming off so many screens because you never know where he's at. They run a spread offense so you can't really help and he's able to pick his spots where he wants to shoot."

Jugovic also scored 30 points in a loss at Lipscomb on Dec. 1 and in a game last season against Eastern Kentucky.

McCall led TSU with 19 points and Wayne Martin finished with a double-double (15 points, 17 rebounds).

Blown opportunity: With the score tied 64-all Tech blew a chance to win in regulation after taking possession with 11.5 seconds remaining.

Point guard Savonte Frazier dribbled to the right of the basket and with less than three seconds remaining simply lobbed the ball up and it hit the side of the backboard.

Zoning out: TSU started the second half strong with McCall and Martin finding ways to score and for the first time since being up midway through the first half (22-20) regained the lead at 35-34 on a bucket by Christian Mekowlulu.

Tech, however, promptly switched back to its zone defense, which had given TSU fits in first half, and the Tigers started to struggle again.

TSU made just one field goal over the next five minutes and Tech went on a 14-2 run.

That put the Golden Eagles back up 48-38.

TSU shot just 30.3 percent from the field for the game and 16.0 percent from 3-point range (4 of 25).

Next up: TSU plays Jacksonville State at home Saturday (7:30 p.m.). Tech visits Belmont at 11 a.m. (WNAB 50).

# TSU's Tahjere McCall is a true original

Joe Rexrode - The Tennessean - January 20, 2017

Tennessee State's hopes of returning to the NCAA Tournament after 23 years rest on the shoulders of a graduate student who never played AAU basketball, who never took the sport seriously at all until 11th grade, who got one last-second Division I offer, who rarely makes outside shots and who wears a tie-dyed warmup shirt before games.

Tahjere McCall also sported red socks with a flower print and shoes of different colors — one red, one black — as he prepared Thursday at TSU's Gentry Center for a game against Tennessee Tech that the Tigers figured to win. While teammates jogged sideline to sideline doing a passing drill, McCall smiled and laughed, throwing an imaginary ball back and forth with teammate Darreon Reddick.

"When he's having fun — when our whole team is having fun — we're a lot better team," TSU coach Dana Ford said of the fifth-year senior. "When we're a little bit uptight and, I guess, anxious, we're just not a good team."

The smiles had faded after Tennessee Tech pulled an overtime upset, 80-74, handing the Tigers (12-7, 3-3 Ohio Valley) their fourth loss in seven games. This does not look like the same team that hung for much of a 10-point loss at Duke, appeared to have a game won at N.C. State before falling in overtime, and handled the best team in the state — the MTSU Blue Raiders — on the road.

But make no mistake, TSU remains the biggest threat to unseating Belmont and claiming the OVC's automatic NCAA bid, which would be the Tigers' third after one-game trips in 1993 and 1994. And McCall is the reason.

He is an elite on-the-ball defender, an offensive slasher with exceptional tools in his first step and ability to see the floor and deliver the ball to teammates. He had 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists Thursday, and that assist

number would have been double or more with teammates converting simple shots.

At 6-foot-5, 195 pounds and with that explosion and feel, McCall will be paid well to play basketball somewhere next season. His jump shot (6-for-26 on threes) may keep him from the NBA. But the focus is on doing something special this season, and McCall's perspective is ample — this is a guy who never saw the floor as a junior varsity player at Carver High School of Engineering & Science in Philadelphia.

"I wasn't really into basketball," he said.

He's a late bloomer, finding his game as a high school junior and preparing to play for Division II Holy Family University in Philly before Niagara came with a last-second scholarship offer. McCall never played AAU basketball and said he was 155 pounds and barely 6-foot the summer before college.

The son of a father who is a locomotive engineer and a mother who helps rehabilitate crack addicts, McCall also is a student. He had the grades and test scores to be accepted to more than 20 universities and was targeting St. John's in New York before basketball became an option.

And then at Niagara under coach Joe Mihalich, McCall was just happy to be on the team and in college. He was up to 6-3 and starting by the end of his freshman year. He was looking elsewhere after Mihalich left for Hofstra.

Anthony Mason, the former TSU great who died tragically of heart failure in 2015, recommended McCall to Ford in 2014 when Ford took the TSU job. Mason's son Antoine played with McCall at Niagara. Ford's impressive tenure owes much to McCall's playmaking and leadership the past two seasons.

"He gives us confidence, makes us believe we

can go up against anybody ... he brings it every night, he brings it every day," Ford said of McCall, who sat out the 2014-15 season under transfer rules. "We're indebted to him for a long time."

And that's why Ford is just fine with McCall expressing himself with socks and mismatched shoes and a tie-dyed warmup shirt.

"It just helps me be comfortable on the court and comfortable in my own skin, being different," McCall said, and off the court Ford said he has never had a single issue with his star.

McCall got a bachelor's degree in mass communications in the spring and is working on his master's in sports administration. So he could have transferred to a Power 5 school and played right away after scoring 14.6 points a game and winning OVC Defensive Player of the Year last season. He said he never gave it serious thought.

"I wasn't going to leave him," McCall said of Ford. "He's done so much for me and this school has done so much for me."

And there's still a lot they can do together.

# Belleville East grad leads Tennessee State past SIUE

David Wilhelm - Belleville News-Democrat - January 25, 2017

EDWARDSVILLE - These are difficult times for the Southern Illinois University men's basketball team.

The Cougars lost 76-56 to Tennessee State in an Ohio Valley Conference game Wednesday night at Vadalabene Center. It was the worst home loss this season for SIUE, which has dropped eight in a row and 14 of its last 15.

"They're a tremendous rebounding team," second-year SIUE coach Jon Harris said of the Tigers, who stopped a three-game skid. "They've got playmakers; they've got big guys."

SIUE (5-17, 0-8 OVC) was without Edwardsville graduate Tre Harris, a redshirt sophomore and the nephew of Jon Harris. Tre Harris is still on the roster, but he took a leave of absence from the team in December for "personal reasons," and Jon Harris did not elaborate on the reason for the absence.

Sophomore Carlos Anderson, an Alton graduate, led the Cougars with 15 points. Junior Jalen Henry had 11 points, and junior Keenan Simmons had 10 points and seven rebounds.

SIUE never led in the game. The Cougars, who trailed 32-18 at halftime, got within eight on a 3-pointer by Henry with 18:19 to play, but could get no closer.

Tennessee State (13-8, 4-4) shot 57 percent from the field (28-for-49) and had 21 assists, including 12 from senior Tahjere McCall. The Tigers outscored the Cougars 34-18 in the paint and outrebounded them 33-20, which helped produce a 17-8 advantage in second-chance points.

"We battled," Harris said. "We shot the ball really well in the second half (52 percent), so we're more than capable. We just got off to a slow start."

SIUE was 13-for-23 from the free-throw line (57 percent).

## REDDICK STANDS OUT

All of Tennessee State's starters reached double figures, including junior guard Darreon Reddick, a Belleville East graduate who finished with 14 points and four 3-pointers.

"It's always good to come home," Reddick said. "I had a lot of people on my ticket list. Thirteen people came. It's always good to play in front of family. I had family, some friends from high school, some coaches from high school. It was a mixture of everybody."

Reddick was pleased with Tennessee State's performance.

"We had to get back to our standard of guarding and rebounding," he said. "We tried to come out as a team and guard the ball, rebound and take care of the ball. If we do that, we should win almost every game."

As at Belleville East, Reddick is still able to use his dribble-drive to get to the rim and break down defenses. But his 3-point shooting also has come along. He connected on four of his six attempts against the Cougars.

"I feel like I can shoot better than in high school," Reddick said. "I could drive in and shoot (then), but I'm a better shooter than (I was) in high school, for sure."

Tennessee State Dana Ford said Reddick is a huge part of the team.

"He's been awesome," Ford said. "He just does what you ask him to as a coach. If you tell him to cut the court in half, literally he'll cut the court in half. If you ask him to close out, his hand's up every time. He'll do it every time."

"He's just a joy to coach. He's a high-character kid. You know what you're going to get. As a coach, the consistency is what we really appreciate."

Reddick said he keeps in touch with his former teammates at East.

"Malcolm (Hill) and I, we still talk and everything," Reddick said of the senior member of Illinois' basketball team. "I miss high school all the time. I think about it. When I come home for Christmas break, Thanksgiving break, I visit the high school and chat with the coaches. I miss it all."

# 5 things to know about the Belmont-Tennessee State men's basketball game

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - January 27, 2017

Five things to know about the Belmont vs. Tennessee State men's basketball game Saturday (7:30 p.m.) at Gentry Center:

## **TSU WON THE LAST GAME IN THE SERIES**

TSU beat Belmont the last time the two teams played. It was in the final regular season game last season and the Tigers claimed an 87-72 win at Gentry Center. Not only did it snap Belmont's winning streak against TSU at six games, but it also was the Tigers' 20th victory, which matched their most wins in a season as an NCAA Division I program.

## **BELMONT IS RIDING A LONG WINNING STREAK**

The Bruins picked up their 10th consecutive win by beating Eastern Illinois Wednesday 77-64. That is tied for fifth in the nation for the longest win streak behind Gonzaga (21 games), New Mexico State (17), Oregon (17) and Arizona (13). Belmont is on its longest win streak since also winning 10 straight during in 2012-13.

## **TIGERS SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT LINEUP**

Coach Dana Ford shuffled the starting lineup in the last two games in an effort to get the Tigers back to playing defense the way they played early in the season. Against Jacksonville State Ford took out senior guard Jordan Reed, senior forward Wayne Martin and junior guard Darreon Reddick and put in sophomore guard Armani Chaney, junior guard Khalil Spencer and junior forward Ken'Darrius Hamilton. Then against SIU Edwardsville Ford put Martin and Reddick back in for Hamilton and Chaney and left Spencer in.

## **EVAN BRADDS IS ON A ROLL**

Belmont senior Evan Bradds, the 2015-16 Ohio Valley Conference Player of the Year, has averaged 24.7 points and 8.2 rebounds over the last six games. With 1,697 career points Bradds is one shy of Craig Bradshaw (2012-16) at fourth place on Belmont's NCAA Division I all-time scoring list.

## **MCCALL SHINES ON OFFENSE**

TSU senior guard Tahjere McCall was the 2015-16 OVC Defensive Player of the Year and currently leads the league averaging 3.0 steals per game, but he flexed his muscle on offense in Wednesday's win over SIUE. McCall scored 11 points and dished out a career-high 12 assists. McCall became the first TSU player to post double-digit assists since Patrick Miller had 12 against Belmont in the semifinals of the 2013 OVC Tournament.

# Belmont crushes Tennessee State 93-76

Mike Organ - The Tennessean - January 28, 2017

Belmont pulled away from Tennessee State late in the first half and never looked back on the way to claiming a 93-76 victory Saturday night at Gentry Center.

A crowd of 7,103 watched the Bruins (15-4, 9-0 Ohio Valley Conference) avenge a loss to the Tigers (13-9, 4-5) in the final game of the 2015-16 regular season.

It was the biggest crowd at Gentry Center this season and included a large contingency of Belmont fans.

The Bruins finished the first half on a 19-9 run, which put them up 39-28 and they never looked back.

It was TSU's most lopsided loss since falling to Vanderbilt 83-59 on Nov. 29.

Evan Bradds led Belmont with 20 points, Austin Luke scored 18 while Nick Smith and Taylor Barnette added 15 each.

It was TSU's fourth loss in five games.

Tahjere McCall led the Tigers with 22 points.

Belmont deadly from 3-point range: Belmont struggled early in the season. The Bruins got off to an uncharacteristically slow start at 4-4, and the main reason was because they were not shooting the ball well, especially from 3-point range. That issue has been corrected. The Bruins were 12 of 24 on 3s. And it wasn't just one player who got hot from beyond the arc. Smith was 4-of-5, Barnette 4-of-6 and Austin Luke 3-of-5.

"We started the second half against Eastern Illinois (Jan. 25) making eight in a row," Belmont coach Rick Byrd said. "We've turned the corner (shooting 3s) since conference play started and the bad start early in the year."

11 straight for Bruins: Belmont picked up its 11th consecutive victory. The Bruins last loss came on Nov. 14 against Middle Tennessee State (79-66). This is their longest win streak since winning 12 straight in the 2011-12 season. Belmont also has won eight straight road games and now owns a three-game lead in the OVC East Division.

TSU couldn't stop Bradds: Bradds, the 2015-16 OVC Player of the Year, managed to get off just three shots in Belmont's loss last season at TSU. He finished with seven points in that game. Bradds came into Saturday's game playing exceptionally well. He had averaged 23.7 points and 8.2 rebounds in the previous six games. Bradds left the game early with a calf injury, but returned midway through the first half and was nearly unstoppable. He finished with 20 points (7 of 9 field goals), eight rebounds and three assists.

TSU lineup: After shuffling the lineup in the previous two games, Tigers coach Dana Ford went with McCall, Delano Spencer, Darreon Reddick, Christian Mekowlulu and Wayne Martin.

Next up: Belmont plays SIU Edwardsville at home Monday (8 p.m., CBS Sports Network). TSU plays Eastern Illinois at home Thursday (7 p.m., CBS Sports Network).

## Former Pallotti standout DeShields shines overseas

David Driver - Laurel Leader (Md.) - February 19, 2017

Former St. Vincent Pallotti basketball standout Keron DeShields admits he is a product of the streets of Baltimore.

As a young boy, he lived with his single mother in a one-bedroom apartment in Woodington Gardens, near Mount Saint Joseph High School.

They also lived in a small apartment in Woodlawn, spent time with his grandmother and moved quite a bit before he was in middle school.

They lived on Liberty Road before they had to move after DeShields' future stepfather was murdered in front of their home, he said. DeShields also lived in Pikesville and played junior varsity basketball at Towson Catholic before finally ending his prep career as a senior at Pallotti in Laurel.

All of that makes his rise to the second-best pro basketball league in Italy all the more impressive after he graduated from Tennessee State last year.

After his college career was over, he worked out in Tennessee and Baltimore and stayed with friends and relatives.

He landed overseas with the help of agent Diego Torres-Malaga.

"It worked out for the best," DeShields said. "I ended up having multiple offers in Italy, France and a lot of other places that I could have gone to play."

DeShields, 24, is in his first pro season as a point guard for Latina, where he was averaging 16.1 points and 3.8 assists through his first 21 games.

"I come from the streets," he said. "I watched my mother grind and watched her work. I

want kids to know they can make it. When I get to the NBA I want kids to know it is not always roses and peaches."

One of his teammates in Italy is former Meade High student Jonathan Arledge, a product of the Laurel Boys and Girls Club, who played college basketball at George Mason and Old Dominion universities and played pro ball last season in Switzerland.

Latina has a population of about 115,000 and is on the south coast of Italy.

"The town I am living now, it is pretty small," DeShields said. "It is about 30 minutes from Rome. In my free time I watch films, like 'The Sopranos,' and different type of games. I talk to my family back home. We have a lot of practices with one game a week. It is a great town; I have no complaints."

The 6-foot-3 guard averaged 16.5 points and 3.0 assists last season after he transferred to Tennessee State of the Ohio Valley Conference. He had to sit out the 2014-15 season, after playing his first three years of college ball at the University of Montana, where he played in the NCAA tournament in 2012 and 2013.

DeShields said the only school that recruited him out of Pallotti was Division III Goucher College in Towson, so he did a prep year in Vermont.

"He was definitely our most valuable player last year," Tennessee State head coach Dana Ford said. "He was a leader, just a driven kid. He really set the tone and the foundation for what our program is all about in terms of being a great teammate and graduating from college and going on to play pro ball and chasing your dreams. His work ethic was unbelievable. He was the hardest worker I have ever been around."

Ford noted DeShields was recommended to him by Maeshon Witherspoon, mother of former NBA player Josh Shelby, of Baltimore's Lake Clifton High.

She had suggested Lake Clifton High grad Daishon Knight to Ford when he was an assistant coach at Illinois State, his alma mater.

"There were some rough patches in the beginning. We had to coach him how to channel his emotions," Ford said of DeShields. "The thing about Keron is he is always wanting to learn. He wants to do things the right way in order to obtain his goal. We helped him as much as we could. Keron really found his own way [to Italy]. Being from Baltimore, he knows a lot of people."

But his long-time goals go beyond pro ball in Italy.

"I am using my time here at practice, with long hours, on fine tuning my game," he said. "I am preparing my game because I really want to make a push for the NBA in the coming year."



## **McCall doubles up on steals record**

David Bocclair - Nashville Post - February 20, 2017

Tahjere McCall topped himself.

With four steals Saturday in Tennessee State's victory over Eastern Kentucky, the senior broke his own program record for steals in a season.

In 25 games, McCall now has 75, an average of three per contest. The 6-foot-5 guard is sixth in NCAA Division I in steals per game and one of eight players with more than 70.

No other Ohio Valley Conference player averages more than 1.5 steals per game or has more than 43 for the season. That makes McCall a virtual shoo-in to become the ninth player in conference history to lead in steals in consecutive seasons. He had 72 steals in 31 contests last season, when he was named the OVC Defensive Player of the Year and finished ninth in the country.

With five more, McCall will become the 12th player in conference history with at least 80 in a season and just the third in the last decade to hit that mark.

In addition to his defensive prowess, the Philadelphia native who transferred from Niagara leads the Tigers in scoring at 14.5 points per game and in assists with 126. He also is third in total rebounds.

Tennessee State (17-11, 8-7 in the OVC) has one game remaining in the regular season. The Tigers play at Belmont on Saturday (5 p.m.).

## Turnover troubles follow TSU into tournament

Robby Stanley - Nashville Post - March 2, 2017

Ask any basketball or football coach in the nation and they'll tell you that turnovers are often the difference between winning and losing.

There was an issue for the Tennessee State Tigers men's basketball team this season, and it played a major part again in a 78-75 overtime loss to Southeast Missouri State in the opening round of the 2017 Ohio Valley Conference Tournament at Municipal Auditorium on Wednesday.

The Tigers (17-13) finished the regular season averaging 14.7 giveaways per game, which was 11th in the OVC. Against Southeast Missouri State, they committed 27 despite having multiple ball-handlers on the court at the same time.

"For the last 10 games of the year, we've played two point guards at the same time," coach Dana Ford said. "[Sophomore guard Armani Chaney] played 40 minutes, [red-shirt senior guard Tahjere McCall] played 37 [against Southeast Missouri State]. To be honest, I just think we turned the ball over. Give them some credit. They played five guards at some times — [and] all the time four guards — so they were fast. They were quick. They could move.

"Sometimes we made poor decisions with the ball, and sometimes maybe we were a little bit too lax with their pressure when they picked it up when they were behind. It's hard to win when you turn the ball over 27 times. I didn't think that guys were trying to do too much. We just happened to turn the ball over."

Chaney and McCall, the two main ball-handlers for the Tigers, finished the game with a combined 12 turnovers. Southeast Missouri State finished shooting 35 percent from the floor and was outrebounded by 19

but still ended up with four more shot attempts in the game because they won the turnover margin 27-13.

"Just [kept] pressure on the ball screens and on McCall mainly," Southeast Missouri State freshman guard Denzel Mahoney said. "We tried to keep him out of the paint and make him make plays that he's not comfortable with making."

The Tigers — who will now wait to see if they will participate in one of various lesser-profile national post-season tournaments — turned it over 16 times or more in six of their final 10 games in the regular season. Including the OVC Tournament, there were six contests this season in which they had 20 or more turnovers.

In three years, Ford has directed a dramatic turnaround at TSU. After a 5-26 record in his first season (2014-15) the Tigers have won a combined 37 games in the past two.

Yet turnovers led to a number of this year's defeats — and an early exit from the OVC Tournament.