

U OF M ATHLETICS



NIKKI BOERTMAN/COMMERCIAL APPEAL
University of Memphis president Dr. M. David Rudd visits with guests at a reception event.

Post Big-12 process, Rudd talks bright future

Memphis is in good position without Big 12

PHIL STUKENBORG
PHIL.STUKENBORG@COMMERCIALAPPEAL.COM

First-year University of Memphis basketball coach Tubby Smith spoke Tuesday at The Rotary Club, a rare public appearance to update his team's preseason progress.

He was introduced by U of M president M. David Rudd, whose appearance followed Monday's announcement by the Big 12 conference that expansion no longer was in the league's immediate plans. The U of M was considered a strong expansion candidate earlier in the process, but was dropped from consideration a month ago.

Rudd and Smith spoke about the Big 12's decision and the U of M's athletic future during, but mostly following, their Rotary Club appearance. Rudd's comments were his first on the Big 12's decision since the Power Five league dismissed Memphis from its pool of candidates in September.

Despite its status outside the Power Five, Rudd said, the U of M has a bright future. He also said he envisioned another round of conference realignment in the not-too-distant future.

"I think we've invested in the right way, so we've invested in the areas academically and athletically that we need to invest," Rudd said. "We've got a great partnership (with) the city of Memphis. We are incredibly well positioned for growth academically and for growth athletically.

"And we will continue to invest. We've got a strategic vision for the university that we'll continue to implement and it will position us well the next time there is a (conference-alignment) shakeup. And there undoubtedly is going to be."

Rudd said "over the course of" the next five-to-10 years there will be additional realignment of the Power Five conferences. The Power Five leagues generally pay their members 10 times in annual shared revenue of what those in the non-Power Five leagues receive. Big 12 schools received \$30.4 million each in shared television and postseason money this year.

"We are committed to being part of (the next wave of realignment)," Rudd said. "We've got the vision and the support to make it happen."

The school's Park Avenue Campus is home to the football program's practice fields and Rudd said construction on the indoor football practice facility should begin soon. Construction has begun on a new men's basketball facility, which is scheduled to open next year.

Rudd said participating in the Big 12 expansion process created momentum for the university.

"You can see that," Rudd said. "We've had two great hires. We had a wonderful hire in football (Mike Norvell) and a remarkable hire in basketball. We brought in a future Hall of Fame coach in basketball. It created great excitement ... and we've never had the kind of financial support we've had in the last two years."

During his talk at the Rotary Club, Smith spoke about other Power Five options for the program in the future. Like Rudd, he expects there to be future opportunities.

"We've got to get busy making sure we're the best in the American Athletic Conference," Smith said. "I know people are hyped up and excited because there was that (Big 12 expansion) talk, but now we have to focus on how we're going to be competitive in the American Athletic Conference."

Rudd said the expansion process helped the university lay a foundation, one that he expected to strengthen and expand.

"What did I learn from this process?" Rudd said. "One, the landscape is remarkably competitive and for us to compete at this level and do it in a meaningful way, we have to make investments that endure over long periods of time.

"We've got to make long-term investments. I've learned the landscape in higher ed, both academically and athletically, is incredibly competitive. It is a year-in and year-out investment process. We've got that vision. We will continue to invest. We will continue to compete. And we will continue to grow. You can't maintain status quo. Status quo ultimately means you slide further and further behind. We're invested for growth."

MLB PLAYOFF ROUNDUP

Blue Jays stave off ALCS elimination, cut lead to 3-1

NOAH TRISTER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TORONTO - Just in time, Josh Donaldson and the Toronto Blue Jays broke out the bats to save their season.

Now they have a chance to really make things interesting in this AL Championship Series.

Donaldson backed up his fiery pep talk to teammates before the game, hitting a home run and turning in a timely diving stop Tuesday to help the Blue Jays avert a sweep with a 5-1 win over the Cleveland Indians.

The Indians still lead the matchup 3-1, but with a couple of big hits and a strong outing by Aaron Sanchez, Toronto hand-

ed them their first loss of this postseason. "I'm not going to give too much away of what I had to say, but just more so getting everybody's attention and focus and understanding," Donaldson said. "I mean, everybody knew coming into today how important today was. But at the same time I just wanted to kind of reiterate that and let the boys know that I was coming to play today."

Cleveland will try again Wednesday to win to earn its first World Series trip since 1997, but the big concern for the Indians coming into the series — an injury-riddled rotation — still lingers. In Game 5, Cleveland will start Ryan Merritt, who has pitched just 11 innings in the majors, against Marco Estrada.

Dodgers 6, Cubs 0: Rich Hill out-pitched reigning Cy Young Award winner Jake Arrieta, Yasmani Grandal hit a two-run homer in the fourth inning and the host Los Angeles Dodgers took a 2-1 NLCS lead. After winning an MLB 103 games during the regular season and sparking belief they could win the World Series for the first time since 1908, the Cubs have been shut out in consecutive games for the first time this year, managing just six hits — five of them singles.

Hill allowed two hits in six innings, struck out six and walked two. Joe Blanton, Grant Dayton and Kenley Jansen finished, giving the Dodgers consecutive postseason shutouts for the first time.

HIGH SCHOOL VOLLEYBALL



BRANDON DILL/SPECIAL TO THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Abigail Ramey and Briarcrest hope to have plenty to celebrate as the TSSAA Division 2-AA state volleyball tournament begins Wednesday.

LOCAL TEAMS CHASE STATE TITLES

Here's a look at the Shelby County teams that will be competing in the TSSAA state volleyball

championships, which get underway Wednesday in Murfreesboro. For more information along with live scoring updates, visit <http://tssaa.org/2016-tssaa-state-girls-volleyball-championships/>

AAA Bartlett

Coach: Sherrie Walker
Record: 27-11

Last state trip: 2014

Opening match: 11 a.m. Wednesday vs. Brentwood (47-4) at MTSU (Court 1)

Outlook: After missing the tournament last season, the Panthers are in Murfreesboro for the 13th time under Walker, the area's winningest active coach. Bartlett has played well down the stretch but will need to be at its very best this week, especially in a very tough opening-round match against Brentwood. Junior libero Audrey Wetzels, who provides an emotional spark with her digging, and savvy senior outside hitter Ariel Gofourth will have to play big.

Walker's take: We're mentally tough ... we're a blue-collar team. We're going to have to work hard, play good defense and dig a lot of balls. But we've got a good group of girls but sometimes they try to hard. When everyone stays disciplined and does their job, we've been successful.

Houston

Coach: Becky Pendleton
Record: 35-16

Last state trip: 2015

Opening match: 11 a.m. Wednesday vs. Farrago (42-4) at MTSU (Court 2)

Outlook: Pendleton—who comes into the tournament with 499 career victories—is delighted with the way this year's young group has come together. Setter Kalea Davis—who was named Most Valuable player of the Region 8 tournament—has gone over 1,000 assists this year and has done a fine job quarterbacking the team. Outside hitter Madison Weir can jump out of the gym and libero Natalie Ziomek gave the team a big boost

after being promoted from the junior varsity.

Pendleton's take: After losing seven college players, six of whom are playing as freshmen ... I can't tell you how excited I am about this team and the future. We played Briarcrest in the Middle Tennessee Classic and lost 27-25. It seems funny to say that was a good loss but it let us know that we can play.

Division 2-AA Briarcrest

Coach: Carla Anderton
Record: 43-3

Last state trip: 2015

Opening match: 6:30 p.m. Wednesday vs. Harpeth Hall (25-6) at MTSU (Court 2)

Outlook: Last year's D2-AA runners-up are the team to beat after a dominating season that saw them go undefeated against in-state competition. The Saints have no weaknesses; Callie Anderton is the state's all-time assist leader and brings a ton of big game experience along with fellow senior Kendal Strand. Abigail Ramey and Rachel Sullivan supply the glue while sophomores Alyiah Wells and Carsyn Starr form as intimidating a middle as Shelby County has ever seen.

Anderton's take: Leadership is stronger and focus has been more consistent all season. The team is focused on the goal by taking one match at a time, players understanding their team role, not overlooking any opponent and bringing their high energy play to every match.

Division 2-A Harding

Coach: Michael Sansone
Record: 38-8

Last state trip: 2015

Opening match: 6:30 p.m. Wednesday vs. King's Academy (24-11) at MTSU (Court 1)

Tigers

Continued from Page 1C

have to address with the NCAA, not necessarily his eligibility but how many games he'll have to sit. We're still discussing that with the NCAA."

Azab played at Chicago Hales Franciscan last year and enrolled after visiting in early September. He originally had to get some visa issues resolved.

"He is a huge body at 290 (or) 285 pounds," Smith said. "We don't have anybody like that. And he is 6-10 with great hands, arms that reach, a great touch, and he's very intelligent, like Chad and Detric.

"When you have intelligent post players like that they don't try to overwhelm



MARK WEBER/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL
University of Memphis guard Mark Crawford (left) drives to the basket against Craig Randall (right) during an open practice at the Larry O. Finch Center.

you with their athleticism. They do it with savvy. That's what (Azab) brings." Lawson, expected to be selected the

league's preseason player of the year, averaged 15.8 points and 9.3 rebounds last season. He was controlled, efficient and smooth during the workout, driving in for a reverse layup on one trip and calmly using his left hand to score inside on another occasion.

Freshman Keon Clergeot also stood out, moreso because of his tank-like upper body. A former Texas Tech signee, Clergeot signed with Memphis in June after being released from his NLI when Smith left for the U of M opening.

"Keon is the only player I've ever taken from another school," Smith said. "And that's only because he was never (enrolled at Texas Tech).

"Keon is an outstanding shooter. K.J. (Lawson) has the ability to knock down the outside shot. Chad is an inside player, but he has range. We have some guys who can knock down the outside shot."