

Jones ready to roll with changes at MC

By Mike Christensen

By way of preparing himself for a return to coaching at Mississippi College after twelve years off the bench, Mike Jones spent hours and hours consulting with lots of people, including an impressive array of current and former coaches.

"Kermit Davis, Jay Ladner, Richard Williams, John Brady, a bunch of folks ... I met with them, visited with them about how things have changed," said Jones, who has been MC's athletic director for the past fifteen years. "What they told me was, basically, the game hasn't changed. The players have changed."

"You've still got to guard people, shoot a high percentage, rebound, pass. But the way they do it now is a little different."

There's no questioning Jones' coaching acumen. Check his resume. A Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame member, he previously coached the Choctaws for sixteen years over two stints, winning a school-record 332 games and five conference championships, making multiple NCAA Tournament appearances and earning several coach of the year awards. His 2006-07 team was ranked third in the country in Division III at one time, made the D-III Sweet 16 and finished 27-3. The court at A.E. Wood Coliseum is named in his honor.

Jones is a former MC player who served as a longtime assistant coach to the late M.K. Turk at Southern Miss and was a successful head coach at Copiah-Lincoln Community College before taking the MC job the first time, back in 1988.

The hallmarks of Jones' teams were gritty defense and efficient offense. His current challenge is to blend his old-school philosophies with this new generation of players – and get MC men's basketball back on track.

The program has lagged since its return to NCAA Division II and the Gulf South Conference. The last winning season was 2012-13, when the Choctaws were still in D-III. The Choctaws went 7-18 last season, 4-16 in the conference. Former head coach Don Lofton, who has returned to his old role as an assistant, encouraged Jones to return to the bench, as did MC president Blake Thompson.

"I prayed about it. I talked with my family about it. It took a long time to decide," Jones said. "I waited and waited for a sign. The door never closed. I think

God was calling me to do this."

The announcement was made in March. Once he got back on the court with the players, Jones said, it didn't take long for him to feel like he was back in his element.

"I'm enjoying it," he said. "I didn't realize until I got back out there how much I missed the relationship with the players, teaching them, motivating them, creating team chemistry. ... I want to be there for the guys, for basketball and in other parts of their lives."

His first team will feature a lot of new players with limited experience. Senior Brandon Boston, the top scorer (15 ppg) and rebounder (6.2) from the 2018-19 team, is the lone returning starter. Dyllan Taylor was set to return at point guard but will miss the season with an injury. Two players, Winceton Edwards and Winford Ross, were named to the GSC Top Newcomers list. Edwards is a transfer from Jones Junior College, while Ross comes in from Holmes Community College.

"We're dealing with some crucial injuries, four guys we were counting on,"

Jones said as he prepped the team for exhibition contests at Southern Miss and Ole Miss on October 29 and November 4. "But that's part of the game. We have to adjust to it. Other guys have to step up. That's how it works."

Jones said he'll still preach defense and good shot selection.

"That's part of the plan," he said. "But I think, to be a champion ... one-dimensional teams, two-dimensional teams don't succeed very often. Champions do a lot of things well. You've got to get the players doing all those things and playing together to be a champion."

MC was pegged to finish 11th in the 13-team GSC. The Choctaws tip off the regular season at home against Belhaven on Friday (November 8). The GSC opener is November 23 in Clinton against West Alabama, one of the league favorites. "I've got good kids, very respectful kids who've bought in," Jones said. "People are going to have to step up, but, yes, I like this team. We've got some athletes. But they just haven't been together long enough yet. We've got to get better each day in practice."

"If you know me, you know I don't have expectations for moral victories. We'll play hard and we'll try to win. That's the goal."



Special to The Clinton Courier
MC basketball coach
Mike Jones

2019-2020 MC BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

NOV 8 (FRI) / 8:00 PM vs BELHAVEN	DEC 18 (SUN) / 3:00 PM vs CHRISTIAN BROTHERS	JAN 18 (THU) / 7:30 PM vs CHRISTIAN BROTHERS	FEB 13 (THU) / 7:30 PM vs VALDOSTA STATE
NOV 9 (SAT) / 7:00 PM vs BLUE MOUNTAIN	DEC 21 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs DELTA STATE	JAN 18 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs UNION (TN)	FEB 15 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs WEST FLORIDA
NOV 12 (TUE) / 7:30 PM vs SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST	JAN 2 (THU) / 7:30 PM vs WEST GEORGIA	JAN 23 (THU) / 6:30 PM vs LEE	FEB 26 (THU) / 7:30 PM vs DELTA STATE
NOV 15 (FRI) / 7:30 PM vs HENDERSON STATE	JAN 4 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs SHORTER	JAN 25 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs UAH	FEB 22 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs UNION (TN)
NOV 23 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs WEST ALABAMA	JAN 9 (THU) / 7:00 PM vs VALDOSTA STATE	JAN 30 (THU) / 7:30 PM vs LEE	FEB 29 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs WEST ALABAMA
NOV 25 (MON) / 7:30 PM vs MONTEVALLO	JAN 11 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs WEST FLORIDA	FEB 1 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs UAH	MAR 3 (TUE) / TBA GSC TOURNAMENT
DEC 3 (TUE) / 6:00 PM vs SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST	DEC 9 (THU) / 7:00 PM vs TALLADEGA	FEB 8 (SAT) / 4:00 PM vs AUBURN MONTGOMERY	MAR 7 (SAT) - MAR 8 (SUN) / TBA GSC TOURNAMENT

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5 YEARS



8 YEARS

