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DETROIT MERCY MEDIA DAY

Titanic changes for UDM

Team's roster remarkably different

BY PERRY A. FARRELL • FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER • NOVEMBER 8, 2008

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Detroit Mercy men's basketball coach Ray McCallum was shooting baskets with reporters during media day Friday, and he still might be the best shooter in the entire program, making seven three-pointers in 30 seconds.

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McCallum was a scoring terror in the Mid-American Conference in the early 1980s and is one of the all-time leading scorers in Ball State history.

His task this season is to resurrect the Titans program, which finished 7-23 last season and was last in the Horizon League at 3-15. During the season, Perry Watson, the team's longtime successful coach, took a

leave of absence and Brandon Cotton, a dependable scorer, left the team.

With 10 new faces in the program, only veterans like Woody Payne, Eulis Stephens and Chris Hayes will use last year's failure as a motivation for turning things around.

"The guys have been great," McCallum said. "I know everyone wants to know what the coach really thinks. I tell our guys there are two things you can control: your attitude and your effort. The attitude of these young guys has been outstanding. We're going through a transition. It's the University of Detroit first, then get better and try to do the things that we need to do."

When a reporter's cell phone went off, McCallum joked: "When my players do



Detroit Mercy's Xavier Keeling shoots over Woody Payne at Calihan Hall on Friday. Payne, a junior guard, is one of the Titans' few veterans.

(Photos by ROB WIDDIS/Special to the Free Press)



Ray McCallum

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that, they have to run laps."

The crowd laughed.

The Titans play Tiffin today in an exhibition game before opening their season Nov. 14 at Purdue.

So what can fans expect from the Titans this season?

"We have a great challenge; we have an outstanding schedule," McCallum said. "Our players have gotten better every day, and they're more focused knowing a game is coming up. We'll learn a lot about our team with officials and you in the stands and guys in other uniforms. Our big guys will be able to go outside, and they also will be able to play on the perimeter.

"(Forward) Chris Hayes will shoot a better percentage behind the three-point line. Everyone is an option. We're going to win because we're going to defend, rebound and take care of the basketball. It sounds fundamental, but that's how you win basketball games."

A key for the Titans is the eligibility of Eli Holman, a 6-foot-9 bruiser who transferred from Indiana when McCallum was hired. He'd be a huge help in the middle. The team should know by next week if he's eligible.

Stephens and Payne are recovering from off-season surgeries and will be counted on to provide leadership.

"Coach Watson was a more defensive-minded coach," Payne said. "Coach Ray also is defensive minded, but he emphasizes a lot of offense also. It has been kind of a hard transition, but everything is coming together. We're pushing the ball a little more. I'll try to get my teammates involved, play with confidence and not turn the ball over."

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