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## **Lady Greyhounds' Coach Expects Exciting Games, Positive Season**

With just one returnee and only two sophomores on the nine-player roster, the Arkansas State University Mid-South Lady Greyhounds will open the season Friday night with something to prove.

“No one really expects much from this group, but we’ll go into every game with the goal of winning it,” said first-year head coach Sonja Tate, who has experienced success as a high school, college and professional athlete and as a high school and college coach. “We’re young, inexperienced, and have a long way to go, but I don’t consider us underdogs.”

“These are some really good young ladies, and I know they try hard and want to do the things that I ask them to do. It’s my job to teach them how to be team players, how to approach the game, and how to be winners. I think all of them really want that and are willing to work toward that end. I think it’s going to be an exciting season, and we’re going to surprise a lot of people.”



Lacordia Williams of Earle, a 5-5 guard, is the lone returnee from last year's squad. Tate said the year of experience playing against collegiate competition will serve Williams well as she enters her sophomore season.

"She knows what it's like to play on a college team, and hopefully her desire and thirst to win will help the young ladies in the locker room and on the court," Tate said. "I'm looking for some good sophomore leadership from her.

"Lacordia has made leaps and bounds since I first saw her last summer, and I'm optimistic that she will be recruited by some of the four-year schools that have already talked to me about her. We've set some lofty goals for her, and she's working to get better every day."

Jasmine Patterson of West Memphis transferred from Williams Baptist College to play and pursue higher education closer to home. The 5-10 forward has been hampered by an ankle injury but is expected to patrol the inside for the Lady Greyhounds.

"Jasmine definitely brings an inside presence for us, offensively and defensively," Tate said. "She can score and moves very well for her size. We're going to lean on her because of her experience and ability. I think the team really looks to her for leadership. She's a very positive young lady who works hard in practice."

Newcomers for 2015-16 include Raven Morrow of Marion; Brayanta Conley of Horn Lake, Mississippi; Regina Garrett of Balch Springs, Texas; Samantha Jackson of Joiner (Rivercrest High School); Ja'Brisha Hawkins of Forrest City; Kimberly Reed of Olive Branch, Mississippi (Byhalia High School); and Kelsey Green of Memphis (Melrose High School).

Tate said she expects Morrow, a 5-3 guard, to be an offensive catalyst for the Lady Greyhounds.

"Raven can shoot the cover off the basketball, and she has long-range depth to her shot. Coach Johnson at Marion said Raven had a green light after she crossed half-court, and her range is like that. The teams we play will have to honor her ability to shoot and be aware of where she is on the court because she's a threat to score at all times.

"Once she understands what I want and gets comfortable with her role on the court, she's going to excel. She's already gotten a lot quicker, a lot stronger, and a lot better. Raven is on top of things and really wants to improve her game. She's going to be a key player for us."

Brayanta Conley, a 5-5 guard, brings a winning attitude and history with her after playing on back-to-back state championship teams in Mississippi.

"I'm really looking for her to step up and show that leadership on the court, in the locker room, and off the court," Tate said. "You're not on a championship team without seeing how

champions play and act. Brayanta is a very tough, strong, aggressive player. She's a very good defensive player, and that's one of the reasons I wanted her. I'm a defensive coach, and she fits in well with what we want to do."

Regina Garrett, a 5-7 guard from Texas, brings plenty of potential. Tate recruited one of Garrett's teammates while coaching at Arkansas State University and recognized college-level talent in the new Lady Greyhound.

"She's a point guard with good size who can play the one, two, three, and four positions," Tate said. "We're going to lean on her a lot as the season progresses. Regina's a really good player who hasn't really been pushed to demonstrate the excellence she possesses.

"Every day I encourage her to move faster and get tougher. She's shown in the weight room that she can be a strong player for us. I think she will help us tremendously this year and will be one of our on-court leaders."

Samantha Jackson, a 5-11 forward, projects as another inside force for the ASU Mid-South women.

"I can't say enough about this kid; she really brings a lot of energy every day," Tate said. "Samantha has that attack mentality that I want on offense and defense, and she rarely takes a break. Her potential is out there. I really think she will be able to go to the next level to play for a four-year school.

"She's also very coachable. You can tell her what she needs to do, and she's going to listen and try to get it done. I see good things happening for her. Samantha will probably be our leader in the post this year."

Ja'Brisha Hawkins, a 5-2 guard, is another determined player.

"She brings it on the court, and she's a great up-the-court defender," Tate said. "Ja'Brisha is a very selfless player who really looks to get her teammates involved. We have to get her to look to score more because she can definitely score the ball. As she gets more games and practices under her belt, she's going to do really well for us."

Kimberly Reed, a 5-4 guard, has shown the ability to jump start the Lady Greyhounds' offense.

"My plans right now are for her to come off the bench for us because she can score immediately," Tate said. "It's not about who starts. I have to have some productivity coming off the bench, and she's definitely that type of player who can play 30-35 minutes for me.

"Kimberly can play the one, two, and probably even three. She's very tough around the basket, can score, and can shoot the threeball. She's going to be really good for us. If she starts

going hard every day, she can do a lot of things that some of the other players can't."

Kelsey Green is 6-0 forward who is relatively new to organized basketball. She started playing as a sophomore in high school and has developed into a talented shot blocker.

"Kelsey's timing on blocked shots is great," Tate said. "She goes up clean, and when she gets around the basket, she's going to block shots. She runs the floor very well, and she's going to do some good things for us. Right now we're trying to get her stronger so she can score around the basket. We're going to need her inside presence on the offensive end."

Tate said she has confidence in her players.

"As I talk about this team from Day 1 to right now, our players have improved 60-70 percent, every last one of them. It's my job to continue to push them, and I think we're going to get a lot better. I have confidence these ladies can do a good job. We're in this together and are looking forward to a positive season."

The Lady Greyhounds open the season Friday night in the Lady Pioneer Classic in Harrison against the host team. They will play Crowder College on Saturday before starting their home season on Nov. 5 against Northwest Mississippi Community College.

To keep up with the Lady Greyhounds' efforts, visit <http://www.asumidsouth.com>.