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REX SHARP
IS MORE THAN
JUST MISSOURI’S
HEAD TRAINER

10 THINGS YOU
DIDN’T KNOW ABOUT
KENTUCKY
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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Our offices are located at 221 S. Eighth St., Columbia, MO 65201.

Circulation: 882-5700
Newsroom: 882-5720
Sports: 882-5729

On the web: ColumbiaMissourian.com

ON AIR
TV: ESPNU
Radio: KTGR/1580 AM
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TIME FOR CHANGE
T.J. Moe doesn’t worry about declining stats affecting his NFL Draft stock or Mizzou legacy. He’s just trying to turn things around.

TEN THINGS YOU DIDN’T KNOW ABOUT...
Did you know the Kentucky men’s basketball team isn’t their most successful athletic program?

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MORE THAN A TRAINER

Rex Sharp, who is in his 17th season as Missouri as a trainer, learned a long time ago that there’s a lot more to treating a player than just patching them up.

BY MIKE VOREL

EX SHARP ISN’T SIMPLY Missouri’s head trainer.
To his players, he’s a stepfather, a teammate and a barber.
At least, that’s what it seems like.

Sharp, who is in his 17th season at Missouri, learned a long time ago that there’s a lot more to treating a player than just patching him up. You have to know when to joke with a person and when to urge him to push that much further. You need to let someone know that he may be hurt, but that doesn’t mean that he has to act like it.

Treatment, Sharp says, isn’t purely physical.

“They’re hurt, and they’re not always able to do the things that they really want to do. And that’s discouraging sometimes. That’s a real emotion, whether it’s depression or whatever word you want to use,” Sharp said. “So it’s our job to keep their spirits up.”

At Missouri, the training room is no place for sulking. Quite the opposite, actually. Sharp and his staff are never afraid to tease a player, regardless of the severity of the injury. And with the informal atmosphere in the room, players inevitably become more comfortable. They go there to receive treatment but often delve into something more personal.

The training room, in this case, is like a barbershop, with Sharp acting as head barber.

“Rick McGuire, a sports psychologist, actually said that the first time, and I kind of latched on to it,” Sharp said. “He said, ‘It’s like a barber shop where a guy will jump up on the table to get their ankles taped, and they just start talking.’ And you know, it’s true.”

Sharp knows where the players are dating. He knows where they live, who they live with and how they’re doing in school. If there’s something on their mind, it’s out in the open before the last bit of tape leaves the roll.

With the countless days of treatment, heckling, and personal conversations, Sharp inevitably forms a bond with his players. There’s a sense of mutual trust there, something deeper than what the average person could ever experience. And with the informal atmosphere in the room, players inevitably become more comfortable. They go there to receive treatment but often delve into something more personal.

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With the countless days of treatment, heckling, and personal conversations, Sharp inevitably forms a bond with his players. There’s a sense of mutual trust there, something deeper than what the average person would have with his or her doctor.

Henry Josey, a running back who has spent the past year recovering from a torn patellar tendon and ACL in his knee, knows this firsthand. When he talks about Sharp, the term “trainer” is rarely used.

He’d rather say teammate, family member or friend.

“He’s pretty much like a teammate to us. That’s how close he is to me,” Josey said. “We’re with him all the time, and he’s sacrificing his family time to be with us and be a family.”

Elvis Fisher, who has had two shoulder surgeries and a knee surgery in his six years at Missouri, takes that analogy one step further.

“Rex is my stepdad,” Fisher said with a straight face. “I don’t know if you guys knew that.”

When you’re more than a trainer — when you’re family — then you truly have the trust of that player. You can tell that person what he needs to hear, and treat him honestly. You can guide him through his lows and eventually celebrate his highs.

When you’re family, you can trust that person with your body and your life.

“This is my life…in his hands,” Josey said, pausing perhaps to emphasize the gravity of the statement. “I went down with a crazy injury, and he has helped me get back to where I am now. I can’t complain about that at all. The trust is there. Everything I’m doing from here on out, I trust him in doing it.”

Despite the fact that he’s been a head collegiate trainer for 29 years, Sharp continues to face new challenges. He hasn’t seen it all. He thought he had, before Fisher and Josey proved him wrong.

“I thought I’d seen every injury. Then this year Travis Ruth ruptures a triceps. I’d never had a ruptured triceps before. Last year Elvis Fisher ruptures a patellar tendon. I’d never had one of those before. Now I’ve had two, because Henry did the same thing,” Sharp said, stopping to laugh and shake his head. “So, just when you think you’ve seen it all…"

His voice trails off, and he just smiles. Sitting in an armchair inside his office, Sharp is surrounded by posters, footballs and trophies. Behind him, there is an old photo that sits framed on a shelf. At the bottom, it says “University of Missouri – 1996.” In it, Sharp and the rest of his staff are kneeling on Faurot Field facing the camera.

He has a long blond mustache and his hair is always perfectly coiffed. Despite the fact that he’s been a head collegiate trainer for 29 years, Sharp continues to face new challenges. He hasn’t seen it all. He thought he had, before Fisher and Josey proved him wrong.

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His voice trails off, and he just smiles. Sitting in an armchair inside his office, Sharp is surrounded by posters, footballs and trophies. Behind him, there is an old photo that sits framed on a shelf. At the bottom, it says “University of Missouri – 1996.” In it, Sharp and the rest of his staff are kneeling on Faurot Field facing the camera.

He has a long blond mustache and his black shorts are decidedly shorter than they would be now, but one thing about Sharp is the same now as it was then. Throughout all this time, relationships have always come first.

“There are going to be injuries, and somebody’s going to have to take care of them,” he said, smiling again. “I’m the guy. I’m going to try to do my best.”

The barber, the stepfather, the teammate — the head trainer — isn’t going anywhere.

JEREMY MACLIN’S RECOVERY

In his 17 years as Missouri’s head trainer, Rex Sharp has seen a lot of players return from injury to experience great success. One story he often tells centers around a player who quickly became one of the most popular in Missouri - Jeremy Maclin. Here is the story of Maclin’s torn ACL and subsequent recovery, in Sharp’s own words.

It all started in the summer of 2006, when Maclin was a true freshman…

“We finished a workout at Faurot, and the players were just going to throw around a few more passes. I can remember Chase Daniel telling me, ‘You go on home. You guys go home, we’re just going to throw the ball.’ So (assistant athletic director) Pat Ivey and I leave, and I hadn’t even gotten home when I get a call and they say, ‘Hey, Jeremy’s gotten hurt.’ So I drive back and sure enough, it was obviously a very significant injury. Very significant.”

Maclin tore the ACL in his right knee on July 25, 2006. On Aug. 3, 2006, he had surgery to repair the injury and rehab began. A few months later, he was already showing incredible progress.

“By October, he was running 110-yard sprints. Pretty good protoplasm there. We were very pleased with his recovery.”

Having been redshirted for the 2006 season, Maclin continued to recover throughout the season. By Spring 2007, his quickness had returned - and then some.

“He came back in the spring, and he ran a faster 40-yard dash than he did before he got hurt. And we don’t have that kind of success every time. And that was pretty cool.”

The next season, his redshirt freshman year, Maclin played his first collegiate game in his hometown of St. Louis against Illinois. Sharp as well as Dr. Pat Smith, who did Maclin’s surgery, were there.

“We’re playing our first game against Illinois, in his hometown, and that’s a big game. The first time he touched the football was a punt return for a touchdown, and I can’t even begin to tell you how cool that was. For us who had worked with him from the time when he was devastated to come back and run the punt back, that was a great feeling.”
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Missouri students (from left) Erin Ebert, Mesha Jones, Miki Sullivan and Steve Goldberg prepare T.J. Moe for his photo shoot. Moe is often the focus of media attention because of his candid responses.

TIME FOR CHANGE

T.J. Moe doesn’t worry about how declining statistics might affect his NFL Draft stock or his legacy as a Missouri player. He’s just trying to turn things around.

BY RICHARD FERNANDEZ // PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BENJAMIN HOSTE

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
IT'S HOMECOMING WEEK at Missouri. But last week was when T.J. Moe got to go home.

The senior receiver headed back to O'Fallon for a brief visit with his family. He went to watch his old high school football team, Fort Zumwalt West.

“We lost,” Moe said.

Moe also watched a couple of St. Louis Cardinals games with his dad while at home. Moe showed up to media day on Monday clearly ready to watch the Cardinals play Game 7 of the National League championship series against the San Francisco Giants. Moe was wearing a red Cardinals warmup jacket over a gray Cardinals shirt. He said he would be watching the game alone in his house while biting his nails.

The Cardinals lost.

During the first break in the Missouri football season, he helplessly watched his teams lose. Even on the team Moe actually plays for, he feels like too much has been out of his control.

“You can’t fix anything as a receiver. You just kind of have to wait for things to come,” Moe said. “We’re gonna get open. We’re gonna run our routes hard, we’re gonna do all the different things that we do, but you’re kind of a little bit helpless as a receiver as far as if the ball is coming to you or not.”

So far, the ball has not been coming. Injuries to the quarterback and offensive line have crippled the Tigers' offense this season. A brutal schedule only made matters worse. This is not how Moe envisioned his senior season would play out.

Moe grew up a Missouri fan.

As a young teen, he knew he wanted to play on Faurot Field someday. Moe didn’t know what position he would play. He just wanted to be there.

“In my younger years, when people said ‘Missouri,’ everybody thought ‘Brad Smith.’ I kind of wanted to be that. When they said ‘Missouri,’ I wanted everybody to think ‘T.J. Moe’ and all my teammates that are playing with me,” Moe said. “That was my goal growing up and then eventually get to the NFL and be a good player.”

After playing quarterback in high school, Moe was recruited to Missouri as a safety. But he quickly switched to receiver.

After dealing with a foot injury his freshman year, Moe exploded on to the scene in his sophomore season. He caught 92 passes for 1,045 yards and six touchdowns that year.

He even had a game-winning 68-yard touchdown catch against San Diego State. The play is known as the “Moe Miracle.” The score came with the Tigers trailing by four with less than a minute to play. It helped the 2010 Missouri team begin the season 7-0 and climb as high as No. 6 in the BCS rankings.

Moe still looks back at that season. He remembers that he would rack up so many catches that reporters would tell him his statistics every week. He averaged a little more than seven catches per game that year.

“It was neat,” Moe said. He took a deep breath as he reflected.

“There’s nothing more fulfilling than seeing your success manifested from all your hard work. I worked really hard not only to get here but then through an injury my freshman year. And then kind of seeing it become everything I wanted it to become and being right there at the top of the country in catches and yards, and our team at one point was ranked No. 6 in the country. It was neat.”

This season is a lot less neat for Moe. The Tigers are 3-4. In yardage per game, the Missouri offense is the 13th worst in the country, or 108th best, depending on how you look at it.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
Moe’s numbers are low. Through seven games, Moe has just 26 catches for 250 yards and one touchdown, but he said he is a much better player now than he was in 2010.

He had a large drop-off in catches last season, which Missouri offensive coordinator David Yost said was a result of the quarterback change. Blaine Gabbert loved to throw to the inside receivers, while James Franklin spreads the ball around more.

This year even more problems have plagued the offense, but Moe doesn’t worry about how declining statistics might affect his NFL Draft stock or his legacy as a Missouri player. He’s still just trying to turn things around.

“We’ve got five games left. We’re more worried about fixing stuff than we are looking back and enjoying how things went,” Moe said. “I’ll look back some day. I’ve had a really fun career. I think I’ve had a good career and I’d like to finish it off the right way.”

Reporters no longer tell Moe his stats every week. He doesn’t keep track either, but if he wanted to, he could count his catches on one hand for most games this season. He still gets plenty of media attention. That’s because when people think “Missouri” they think “T.J. Moe,” especially media members who heard Moe speak at SEC media days in July. Moe received a standing ovation from the media because of his candid responses.

When junior receiver L’Damian Washington first met Moe, he was surprised at how frank Moe was with his words. “His first words (to me) were ‘I hate KU.’ And I’m like, ‘Bro, it’s just football,’” Washington said. “And he was like ‘No, you don’t understand,’” and I really didn’t understand until he really broke it down and then my first game playing Kansas.”

Moe schooled Washington, who is from Shreveport, La., on Missouri football. Washington appreciated the lesson, but what really impressed him was Moe’s leadership.

“When you got a guy like T.J. that leads by example, a lot of guys are willing to follow a guy that’s always willing to put himself out there first and lead the team,” Washington said.

Although other Missouri receivers tower over Moe in height, the 6-foot senior is still the leader of the pack. Junior receiver Marcus Lucas said the players trust Moe because of his experience and consistency. The 6-foot-5 Lucas, 6-foot-4 Washington, and 6-foot-6 Dorial Green-Beckham can’t always mimic the much smaller Moe’s technique, but they do try to adopt his leadership skills.

“When he’s talking, we’ll listen,” Lucas said. “He just wants us to keep fighting. It’s his senior year. We want to win for him, get a bowl game for him.”

For Missouri to reach a bowl game, the Tigers will have to win at least one game on the road, either at Florida, Tennessee or Texas A&M. While some players want to get to a bowl game for Moe, the senior wants to do it for the young players on the team.

“We’ve got some younger guys that really haven’t tasted the success like I have in past years,” Moe said. “We’re just working on it. Trying to make it easier on them, trying to lead them in the right direction and get back to winning.”

L’DAMIAN WASHINGTON, junior receiver
Aft a bye week that allowed the team to heal up and put its losses behind it, Missouri is looking for its first Southeastern Conference victory against Kentucky, a team that is 0-5 in the SEC and 1-7 overall.

But other than its difficulties on the field this season, what else stands out about the Wildcats? Well, as Missouri prepares for another Homecoming game, here’s 10 things you might not know about Kentucky.

— MIKE VOREL

Kentucky’s school colors were determined, in part, because of a necktie. Late in 1891 the student body held a meeting to decide the school’s colors. When trying to determine what shade of blue to choose, football player Richard C. Stoll pulled off his royal blue necktie and held it up. The students decided on that particular shade of blue, as well as light yellow. However, in 1892 the yellow was changed to white, a combination the school still uses today.

The Wildcat mascot was established during the 1976-77 academic year and featured a life-size wildcat that walked around in a Kentucky uniform and cheered for the Wildcats. However, this giant predator was predictably not embraced by small children, who were often afraid of the mascot. To solve that problem, the mascot “Scratch” was introduced a few years later, a more cartoonish Wildcat who is friendlier and approachable. To this day, both mascots regularly attend Kentucky’s athletic events.

While Kentucky’s men’s basketball team is the winningest program in college basketball, it wasn’t the first basketball team to be established by the university. The women’s team actually came first, playing its first season in 1902. The men’s team was established a year later and has won eight national championships since.

Perhaps the most famous shot in college basketball was made at the expense of Kentucky in 1992. Down 103-102 in overtime of the East Regional of the NCAA tournament, Duke had 2.1 seconds to score and get past Kentucky. Grant Hill inbounded the ball by throwing an overhand pass three-quarters the length of the court that was caught by Christian Laettner at the free-throw line. Laettner turned and hit a jumper as time expired to beat the Wildcats, a play that serves as a low point in an otherwise proud basketball culture.

The men’s basketball team is actually not the most successful athletic program at Kentucky, though. The school’s cheerleading program has won 19 national championships, more than any other college program. It has been particularly dominant in the past decade, winning 10 national titles from 2002 to 2012.
**1** Lexington is known as the “Horse Capital of the World,” even though it isn’t. The city got its nickname because of the bounty of horse farms that surround the city’s downtown area. However, the city of Ocala, Fla., is actually the “Horse Capital of the World,” according to the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Despite all the numerous signs in town that declare otherwise, Lexington doesn’t have rights to the title.

**2** Lexington called Virginia home before Kentucky. When Lexington was established as a city in 1775, Kentucky was not yet a state. Therefore, it was originally Lexington, Va. It did not become part of Kentucky until Kentucky was established in 1792. Now, Lexington is the second largest city in Kentucky, smaller only than Louisville.

**3** Kentucky’s football stadium, Commonwealth Stadium, was built in 1973, which still makes it the newest stadium in the SEC. It was expanded in 1999 and has a capacity of 67,942.

**4** Kentucky broke the color barrier in the SEC in 1966, when Nat Northington and Greg Page were allowed on the football team. The SEC was the last major football conference to accept black players.

**5** Before he became an icon at Alabama, Paul “Bear” Bryant was a Wildcat. Bryant served as Kentucky’s head football coach from 1946 to 1953, leading the team to its first bowl appearance in 1947 and first SEC Championship in 1950. He’d go on to win six national championships as the head coach of the Crimson Tide.

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