

PAC-10 PICKS



Peter Hockaday (20-16)



Adam Jude (21-15)



Hank Hager (19-17)



Jesse Thomas (19-17)



Mindi Rice (22-14)



Michael Kleckner (16-20)



Scott Abts (16-20)

A note on how this works: The pickers (the sports staff, the editor-in-chief and one designer) choose teams against the Las Vegas spread, meaning that if the picker chooses the favored team, that team would have to beat the spread — win by more points than the spread — for the picker to 'win' the pick.

Favorite

Underdog

(Spread in parentheses next to favored team)

Washington @ Oregon (8)

Washington Oregon Oregon Oregon Oregon Washington Washington

Oregon State (15) @ Stanford

Oregon State Stanford Stanford Stanford Stanford Stanford Stanford

Arizona State @ USC (14)

USC Arizona St. USC USC Arizona St. Arizona St. Arizona St.

Arizona @ California (16.5)

California California California California California Arizona California

Ohio State (9) @ Illinois

Ohio State Ohio State Ohio State Ohio State Ohio State Illinois Ohio State

Texas (5.5) @ Texas Tech

Texas Tech Texas Texas Tech Texas Tech Texas Tech Texas Tech Texas

Mississippi State coach won't resign post

Jim Mashek

Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

BLOXI, Miss. — The losses are mounting, and the critics are growing, but Mississippi State coach Jackie Sherrill said Tuesday his resolve is as strong as it's ever been in his 36-year career.

Sherrill, 58, addressed his job security during his usual Tuesday afternoon press conference at the Bryan Building on the MSU campus. He also was given a vote of confidence by State's longtime athletics director, Larry Templeton.

Templeton and former MSU president Donald Zacharias brought Sherrill to Mississippi State after the 1990 football season. Sherrill has the longest tenure of any coach in the Southeastern Conference.

Sherrill's squad faces Tennessee on Saturday at MSU's Scott Field, the first meeting between the schools since the 1998 SEC championship game in Atlanta. This game, however, is being played under much different circumstances.

Tennessee, a familiar team in the Top 10, is 5-4 overall and 2-3 in SEC play. State, which finished in the final Associated Press poll in both the 1999 and 2000 seasons, has become the last-place team in the SEC West. The Bulldogs have lost 13 of their last 15 SEC games, as well as 14 of their last 20 overall. They're also facing NCAA scrutiny, for the first time since the squad was hit with light sanctions in 1996.

State (3-6 overall, 0-5 in the SEC) has been outscored 180-71 in league games this season.

But Sherrill sees brighter times ahead for the Bulldogs, with him on the sideline to boot.

"You can go either one of two ways," Sherrill said. "It can either wear you down, or you can become more excit-

ed about it. I'm the kind of guy that when the daylight goes out, I'll turn the lights on to make sure we keep playing until I win."

The Bulldogs had won just three SEC games in the previous four seasons before Sherrill's arrival in 1991. State went 7-5 and played in bowl games in each of his first two seasons, and posted an 8-4 record in 1994. After two lean years, State went 7-4 in 1997, but did not play in a bowl game, followed by the '98 squad that represented the SEC West in the league championship game.

State lost that game to eventual na-

tional champion Tennessee.

In 1999, Sherrill led MSU to its first 10-win season since World War II, and the Bulldogs won their first bowl game since 1980. The next year, State knocked off nationally-ranked Florida and Auburn in successive weeks before slumping late in the season. State finished 8-4 after outlasting Texas A&M 43-41 in the Independence Bowl.

Since then, the Bulldogs have gone due south, but Templeton seems convinced Sherrill is the man to lead State back to prosperity.

"We always evaluate our coaches after the season," Templeton told The

Associated Press on Tuesday. "I don't have any reason to believe we should be thinking about changing coaches."

Sherrill's record at State is 73-62-2, including a 42-49-1 mark in the SEC.

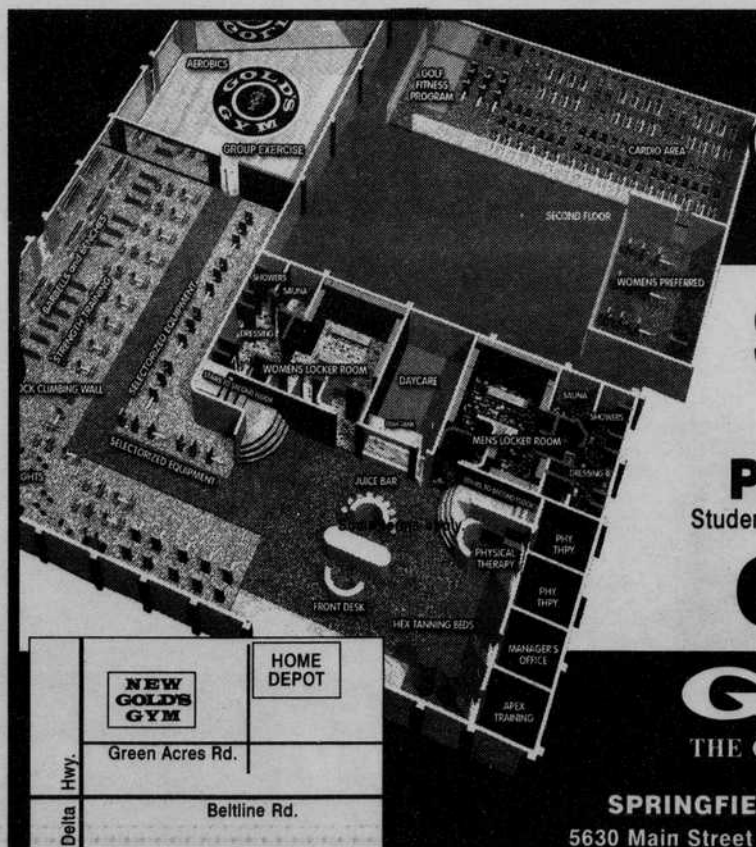
"Jackie Sherrill didn't become the winningest coach in Mississippi State history without knowing what to do to fix it," Templeton said. "He has our support that we're going to get it fixed."

Support from influential State alumni, including the Bulldog Club, might be another story. Sherrill has three years left on his contract and is one of the lowest-paid coaches in the SEC. Including perks, Sherrill's annual con-

tract is worth about \$700,000.

It's been a disastrous 2002 season for the Bulldogs, as starting quarterback Kevin Fant was suspended by the NCAA for State's opening game at Oregon. Freshman tailback Nick Turner, a key part of a celebrated recruiting class, was arrested last month for possession of counterfeit money, and NCAA investigators have interviewed MSU athletes on the Starkville campus on at least two separate occasions since August.

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