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WHAT'S INSIDE...

Responses to column on potential state lottery

A real gem: Ole Miss freshman runs jewelry business

Baseball schedule breakdown part three

SEE **OPINION** PAGE 2

SEE **LIFESTYLES** PAGE 5

SEE **SPORTS** PAGE 6



Under the immigration ban

Executive order keeps student's family a world away

PHOTO BY: LANA FERGUSON

LANA FERGUSON

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Last week, engineering graduate student Moones Alamooti was counting down the days until she would see her parents. It's been months since she's felt her mother's embrace or seen her father's smile peeking out from behind his white mustache.

Just six days before her parents could board their plane, they realized their trip

wouldn't happen... at least not within the next 90 days.

On Jan. 27, newly inaugurated President Donald Trump signed an executive order banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries for at least 90 days. Among that list was Iran, Alamooti's native country.

When asked about the travel ban, Alamooti pauses. Her brown eyes look toward the

ceiling as if she is trying to remember where she was in the moment or possibly holding back tears. She sighs heavily.

"That was ..." she trails off. "That was a bad experience for me."

In Iran, obtaining a travel visa for the United States takes effort and time. There is no American embassy in the country, so Iranians have to travel elsewhere, like Turkey,

to apply for a visa, go through an interview and background check and wait until they are approved.

Alamooti's parents' visas expire in a month, but the plane they booked tickets for has come and gone.

Her father and mother, Abbas and Zar, and her brother, Mohsen, all still live in Iran. Alamooti is very close to her family.

"Based on our culture, we live together and we don't separate when we get like 18 years old," Alamooti said. "All the time I was with my family. We did everything together."

Alamooti first arrived on the Ole Miss campus August 2013. She laughs thinking of how long it has been since

SEE **BAN** PAGE 4

Campus tackles population growth with expansion

JENNIFER FRONING

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The university hired three architectural firms to renovate and expand Farley Hall and Connor Hall under the stress of a growing student body.

Farley Hall houses the school of journalism and Connor Hall houses accountancy and business. Journalism has seen a 50 percent increase in students in the last seven years, and accounting and business have grown about 27 percent, said Larry Sparks, vice chancellor for

administration and finance.

"You sort of have to read the tea leaves if you will, estimate what will happen with your student population, with growth, therefore with need," Sparks said. "With these facilities, we have the capacity to have a little more growth."

Facilities Planning is currently working on more than 150 construction projects on campus.

"We're working on many, many buildings. These are



PHOTO BY: KAMERA GRIFFIN

SEE **EXPANSION** PAGE 3

Construction continues near the Whirlpool Trails in Oxford. The Whirlpool Trails are one of the university's more than 150 construction projects.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear editor,

In response to Julia Grant’s column of Feb. 2 (State Lottery Will Move Mississippi Forward), I offer an alternative viewpoint while simultaneously agreeing with her that we “must eradicate poor and unequal education in the state.” A state lottery, however, is a bad idea.

Contrary to the notion that a state lottery generates an enormous revenue stream, the reality is that a lottery is ineffective at producing new revenue but merely redistributes existing revenue.

From data cited by Beckert and Lutter (2013) in their paper on class-based lottery play, the average US household spends \$162 annually on lottery tickets — this is not new money, but money that is re-allocated from other priorities in order to play the lottery, translating into less money being spent for home mortgages, rent, food, transportation, entertainment, education, clothing and medicine.

Moreover, a state lottery is very expensive to maintain.

The John Locke Foundation’s analysis of the North Carolina Lottery (2001)

revealed that for every dollar raised by the lottery, an additional 52 cents was needed to pay for expenses of raising that dollar. Such figures are typical across the board for state lotteries, making them economically inefficient.

Furthermore, according to Jones (2013), lotteries fail to increase state education budgets significantly and may cause an overall decrease in state education budgets by “crowd(ing) out charitable donations to education without an accompanying increase in state expenditures” (p. 9). Again, this is more evidence of lotteries simply redistributing existing income.

Like Ms. Grant, I support contacting our legislators to make our wishes known. I just don’t wish for a state lottery, which is, as Ambrose Bierce once said, “a tax on people who are bad at math.”

Morris Baker is an adjunct professor of leadership and counselor education, and director of the Baptist Student Union.

Dear editor,

In a recent column regarding the proposed state lottery in Mississippi, the author advocates passionately for the Mississippi legislature to amend the state lottery proposal, thereby allocating the revenue earned for education, rather than the state’s general fund. A noble call to arms, indeed — but one I believe needs clarification.

A large percentage of the 44 states that have lotteries allocate the money to education spending. Yet as The Washington Post highlighted in 2012, many states which sponsor lotteries to fund public education use the funds to cover education budgets, rather than add to it as lagniappe, so to speak.

As John Oliver points out in his 2014 investigation of state lotteries, state lotteries provided no additional education funding in 21 of the 24 states that allocate lottery revenue to education. As his example shows, North Carolina’s Education Lottery aimed to add \$500 million a year to the state’s education budget. Yet the law’s initial language ensuring the

revenue supplemented the education budget was ultimately stripped from the bill. Since then, NC has cut education funding across the board, allocating less to the education budget than it did before enacting its lottery.

In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau ranked Mississippi 46th on education spending per pupil, an embarrassingly low figure. Like the author, I wholeheartedly agree that if Mississippi is to enact a lottery, the revenue should be earmarked for education. But in order for the lottery to have the power to “alter the course of [a] child’s life,” as the author pleads, we must ensure the revenue goes to “supplementing” Mississippi’s education budget, rather than covering it. Only then can we give the youth of this state the tools and education to better themselves, this state, and our future.

Taylor Hardenstein is a 3L Juris Doctor Candidate from Pass Christian.

Read the column “State lottery will move Mississippi forward” on the DMonline.com

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The Daily Mississippian welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be e-mailed to dmlatters@olemiss.edu.

Letters should be typed, double-spaced and no longer than 300 words. Letters may be edited for clarity, space or libel. Third-party letters and those bearing pseudonyms, pen names or “name withheld” will not be published. Publication is limited to one letter per individual per calendar month.

Letters should include phone and email contact information so that editors can verify authenticity. Letters from students should include grade classification and major; letters from faculty and staff should include title and the college, school or department where the person is employed.

EXPANSION

continued from page 1

important ones. I would say that there aren't many buildings on campus that aren't important ... because everyone is doing valuable work," said Ian Banner, director of facilities planning and university architect. "The question is trying to keep up with everybody and accommodating everyone's needs as quickly as we possibly can. That's always been our challenge."

Sparks said the school administrators asked the Board of Trustees to hire architects for both of the projects and approved them to spend \$1 million. The board put out requests for qualified firms in the architectural and design community and a separate committee reviewed those who responded. The committee composed of representatives from facilities planning, journalism, accountancy and business chose the firm best qualified for each project individually.

The committee chose Jackson firm JH & H in a joint venture with Minneapolis, Minnesota firm Perkins & Will to lead the business and accountancy expansion. The architects of the Farley project are Barlow, Eddy, Jenkins also from Jackson.

The programming stage of this project involves finding out what is needed for the expansions and then prioritizing the needs and wants of the three schools. The architectural firms will use their previous experience working with similar buildings of their size and complexity to arrive at a design for the spaces needed, balance with cost.

"Sometimes that number takes our breath away, and we go 'That's a little bit more than we thought,'" Banner said. "Then all of us – the users, the architects, the facilities planning members – we then have to get serious about what are the needs and what are the wants. We

have to cut things back and decide how much money we have and how much space can we get with that amount of money."

After plans are finalized, the architectural firms will spend one year designing their respective expansions. Once a design is settled on, the project will take roughly 18 months to complete construction.

The facilities planning department and the architectural firms have to decide where the best place to put an addition would be without making it look like they just stuck an addition on a beautifully historic building. They have to consider if there are roads that have to be moved or what the addition would look like.

"These two buildings are large and complex," Banner said. "It's going to take a lot of thought to come up with

a meaningful solution to the problem."

Banner said the architects' goal is to keep these buildings aesthetically pleasing and make the addition look like it was part of the existing building. They do not want an addition that looks too small or too overbearing. He said these firms want to make the best use of the land and space as they can.

Once a design has been finalized and approved by the Chancellor, Provost and Vice Chancellor Sparks, the university will contact potential donors, alumnae and friends to help fund these projects. Administrators need to know the total dollar value and have a design to show before they can start fundraising.

Facilities planning, the architects and administration share their designs through-

out this process. Banner said the team wants to make sure they don't surprise people with what the buildings will look like, including the students. They will post pictures of the finished design during construction so students are aware of what the finished addition will look like.

Banner said the university understands every project undertaken is going to cause some degree of inconvenience in day-to-day operations, so there has to

be careful planning as to how many buildings can be worked on simultaneously.

"We can't build big buildings without anybody noticing," Banner said. "We have to remember that life goes on. Teaching occurs, learning occurs, and that's why we do what we do, to support that. Sometimes as we progress, as we build ... we can actually inconvenience those we are trying to help. That's the nature of construction, unfortunately."



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PHOTO BY: LANA FERGUSON

Moones Alamooti holds her phone with a photograph of her family on it. The caption says, "The love of family is life's greatest blessing." Her family still lives in her native country of Iran.

BAN

continued from page 1

she first made a home in Oxford.

She had studied at Iran's most prestigious university, the University of Tehran, which is large. Alamooti said she wasn't intimidated by Ole Miss' size or the amount of people on campus. The culture shock and homesickness hit her hardest.

"The first days were all so awful because I was so far from the family, and there's also a time difference. Here it was night, and there it was morning," Alamooti said. "My gosh, I was like, 'How can I pass the days?'"

The first few days were the worst, but when Alamooti started teaching and getting to interact with other people and students she found her place.

Alamooti's American story is mostly happy. She said she fortunately hasn't felt discriminated against for her nationality or religion.

"My colleagues are so kind to me and most of them are

American," Alamooti said. "They were so welcoming. Even though this kind of thing has even happened, they support me and they sent the message, 'Don't worry about it. You're not alone,' and if any problem happens just to come to them."

She feels like the university has always supported her, including now more than ever.

“If one person is bad, if one Muslim did something wrong, the other people are not the same as that person.”

Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter released two statements responding to Trump's executive order, the first on Jan. 29 and the second last Wednesday. Alamooti received a letter from the Office of International Programs once the ban was in place, offering support and advice.

In the same way Alamooti's parents cannot travel into the United States, despite hold-

ing valid visas, Alamooti has been advised not to return home right now.

"My family was also worried about what would be the feedback of our people," Alamooti said. "Do they change their mind about me? I'm under so much pressure and I'm a sensitive person, so they were worried about me."

Alamooti hopes in the near

future her family won't have to worry as much about her and she won't have worry as much about what tomorrow will bring.

"I guess in this century, people just don't believe in this kind of boundary that they can go on calm and interact with each other," Alamooti said. "Especially for me as a foreigner here, I really hope when I sleep at night

as a foreigner, when I want to sleep, I don't feel this much kind of anxiety. I just think, 'What is going to happen for me tomorrow?'"

What will happen tomorrow is a valid question since Trump's executive order has faced backlash in the form of citizen protests, was temporarily lifted and has already been reinstated in the span of

a week.

She is not giving up though.

"I'm here," she said. "I could have gone back but I kept thinking that I came here because I wanted to continue my studies, so I should fight for my goal. I should keep working and working and don't give up and don't feel disappointed."

If nothing else, she wants

people to understand one person does not represent an entire group.

"Even if people see someone as a bad person or from any nationality or from any kind of religion, they should not generalize that person as a whole group," Alamooti said. "If one person is bad, if one Muslim did something wrong, the other people are not the same as that person."

As of Monday night, the 90-day travel ban for immigrant and nonimmigrant visa holders into the U.S. from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, 120-day suspension of the refugee admission program and indefinite suspension for refugee processing of Syrian nationals was halted.

Three federal judges will hear oral arguments challenging the executive order on immigration in an hour-long hearing Tuesday. This will determine the immediate fate of tens of thousands of visas that had been revoked earlier in the week.

Key facts relating to the immigration ban:

- President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Jan. 27 banning entrance of all refugees and immigrants from several countries.
- Countries affected: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen
- Whereas all refugees were blocked for 120 days, those from Syria were banned indefinitely.
- Of the 90,000 visas affected, 42,542 were issued to Iranians.
- A federal judge halted the travel ban, permitting visa-holders and residents to enter the country.

FACTS: STATE DEPARTMENT, CNN, EXECUTIVE ORDER TEXT

Films that still matter: 'My Life As a Dog' transcends

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As the Oscars near, it is important to remember some films that may have been overlooked in the past. "My Life as a Dog" is a Swedish-language film that almost flawlessly captures the innocence, pain and turmoil of growing up.

"My Life as a Dog" earned director Lasse Hallström a Best Director nomination at the 60th Academy Awards in 1988. This is of particular note because it is one of seven foreign language films to be have a "Best Director" nomination in the past three decades. The subtitles do not take away from the experience of the movie.

The film follows a 12-year-old boy named Ingemar as he is sent across the country to a small village when his mother becomes ill. There, he is exposed to a wide array of quirky characters, both adult and children.

The village is enticing with strange events, from children boxing in the top of a barn, playing "doctor" with the tomboy girl, to Ingemar being exposed as a peeping Tom to the attractive lady that works at the glass mill.

However, it is not all fun and games in this small Swed-

ish village. Ingemar must deal with the painful realities of growing up. Love, loss and dealing with changes inside and out offer a powerful dynamic into the harsh realities of early adolescence. All of this is handled rather brilliantly.

The pain and terrors of life are expressed through death, lost love and even the simple desires, such as a 12-year-old boy wanting to talk to his mother. It is difficult to express how wonderful this movie truly is without giving out major plot points, but it will make the viewer laugh, cry and most of all: think. The characters are multi-dimensional, and Hallström makes the viewer care about them. This is where "My Life as a Dog" succeeds most. The character development is superb, and should be the standard on how to tell a story.

Hallström does a terrific job of maintaining the balance of an innocent childhood, and painful experiences that happen with life, as well as growing up. What Hallström does particularly well is make the viewer grow up with Ingemar. Not too much, nor too little is revealed in the plot line until the time comes. It is the closest thing to a flawless movie one can ever find.

It also makes the viewer



PHOTO COURTESY: AMAZON.COM

wonder, what happened to Hallström's story-telling abilities? The same person who made a flawless movie with fantastic characters in "My Life as a Dog" lost his way. Rather than try to make a movie that makes the viewer feel and experience through dynamic characters and creative storytelling, Hallström's spent

the past decade making movies with generic plotlines and Nicholas Sparks-level gag-inducing heart string pulling. The same person that made incredible movies like "My Life as a Dog" and "The Cider House Rules" is also responsible for the godawful "Dear John," "Safe Haven" as well as his latest dud, "A Dog's Pur-

pose."

It is a shame to see a director waste his potential with shameless sugar, when he is more than capable of making a true classic film. "My Life as a Dog" represents everything great about the coming-of-age film, but also represents how far Lasse Hallström has fallen.

Ole Miss student Lakia Taylor finds joy in jewelry

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Lakia Taylor, a freshman marketing major, came to Ole Miss with hopes of making connections while expanding her clientele and business called Kia's Jewels.

Kia's Jewels is an online jewelry and clothing store rooted from a jewelry kit gifted to Taylor on her eighth Christmas.

"I made earrings completely out of string along with earring hooks and beads," Taylor said.

Mary Taylor, Taylor's mom and inspiration, said she is supportive of her daughter's business.

"I have always expressed to Lakia if she had a passion to make jewelry and a love for fashion, to start her business now and not later," she said. "Since then, Lakia has had the determination to grow her business as she got older."

The Brandon native did not realize how profitable her jewelry making could be until she began selling her jewelry in a local daycare. Taylor noticed how much of an appeal her jewelry made to many women in her community and decided to continue the craft.

Taylor's father was the first African-American lease owner of Dairy Queen in the state of Mississippi. Her grandparents owned an upholstery and a construction business.

"I grew up in business all my



PHOTO COURTESY: KIASJEWELS.COM

life," she said.

With the help of her business mentor, running a business came naturally to Taylor. As a business owner and student, she is constantly working. Whether it's completing assignments, studying, attending meetings or events, taking phone calls, making and packaging her jewelry while maintaining a website and healthy

relationships with her family and peers, Taylor gets the job done.

"If I slow down, business and everything else around me slows down, so I have to keep going," Taylor said.

Taylor's family and community have been her support system since she started making jewelry. Now at Ole Miss, Taylor has gained more supporters,

including her community assistant, Ebonie Baker.

"I love her business, and I find it completely amazing that a young person like herself has so much talent that has went unnoticed for so long," Baker said.

Baker met Taylor while the jewelry-maker was moving into her dorm, and said she has watched Taylor obtain more confidence in herself and her business.

"Since her business started booming, she has a lot of orders to fill and that is a lot for one person to do, especially someone that is in college and trying to have a social life," Baker said.

Taylor has partnered with some of the university's organizations. Through these partnerships, the organizations have committed to help Taylor promote her business. For every sale the organization gets from promotions, that specific organization receives a percentage of the sale.

Taylor finds her inspiration through her life experiences. Taylor, the oldest of four children, watched her mother work full-time while getting her bachelor's degree and raising children. When her father was diagnosed with cancer, Taylor found herself picking more responsibilities around her house.

Making her jewelry became a hobby and outlet that she chose to strive on.

"I admire and support Lakia in her business because she is trying to achieve her goal, and I wish her well because she is a freshman, and she is trying to accomplish her dream," Mary Taylor said.

Taylor supports herself financially during the semester, although much of her profits go back into her business.

"One thing I can say is a student can start a business in college but it can take time to build up until you really start making money because investment in the business is very important," Taylor said.

"It takes a lot of advertising and work to get great support," said Taylor. She found publicizing her business to be the most important detail in owning and keeping Kia's Jewels regulated.

"If people don't know about the business, then many potential customers are unaware."

Taylor describes herself as goal-oriented and optimistic.

"I will complete anything that comes to mind," said Taylor.

Taylor's personality and aspirations can be seen through her business, which promotes positivity.

"My purpose is to inspire others by bringing all people together through my business," said Taylor. "I want people to not feel as though just because the odds seem to not be in your favor, you can still be successful in whatever you choose."

Ole Miss baseball schedule breakdown: April

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Two months into the 2017 season, Ole Miss Baseball fans should have a pretty clear idea of how the team stands up against national competition. The Rebels start their looming April schedule right off the bat with the final game of their series against Mississippi State on April 1. The finale should promise plenty of excitement within the heated in-state rivalry.

After the collision with the Bulldogs, Ole Miss will travel to Pearl for a midweek contest versus Southern Miss. The Golden Eagles finished the 2016 season with a 41-20 record, and split the series with the Rebs 1-1. With even more young talent, Ole Miss will look to repeat the script of these teams first matchup last year, a 6-2 Rebels win.

Up next for the Rebels is a three-day visit from the Crimson Tide. Ole Miss dropped two



FILE PHOTO

Errol Robinson throws to second base in attempt for a double play during a game against LSU last season. Ole Miss hopes to win the series against LSU in Baton Rouge, a task that hasn't been done in nearly 40 years.

of three in Tuscaloosa last year, being shut out in one and only scoring twice in the other. Hosting the series at home in Swayze should help Ole Miss avoid a back-to-back losing record after

facing Alabama.

Two days after the Tide leaves town, Ole Miss will board the bus once more for Hattiesburg. There they will face-off against Southern Miss for the second time in just a week. Having

faced-off a week prior gives both teams the opportunity to not only study their returning opponent, but also have a week's worth of time to practice for them. This will likely result in two much more prepared, and thus dangerous, teams. The game, like last year's series, could really swing either way.

Next on the Rebels' radar is LSU in Baton Rouge, a place where Ole Miss hasn't won a series in nearly 40 years.

The No. 3 ranked team in the nation will surely be a challenge, especially in their home environment. This will be a huge opportunity for this young team to gain some ground in the SEC West race, and have some serious postseason implications. Ole Miss took two of three from the Tigers in Oxford last spring, when they stood at No. 8. Regardless of ranking though, this series will be an important test for both teams and probably a very watchable matchup if nothing else.

Arkansas Pine-Bluff visits Swayze on April 19. The visiting Lions won just five non-conference matchups last year and shouldn't give Ole Miss much of a headache. Just days after they leave town, Missouri and pitching-standout Tanner Houck will arrive on April 21. The right-hand pitcher was named SEC player of the week twice as a sophomore last season and improved on his already stellar freshman campaign in nearly all aspects of his game. The contest should prove interesting and mark the Rebels' third SEC East matchup of the season.

After a day's rest Ole Miss heads once again to Pearl to face-off for a rematch with Mississippi State in their annual Governor's Cup game. The night game will surely be of interest throughout the state as one of these teams will be out for blood. The culmination of an intense rivalry makes for great baseball, as this game will be one of the most anticipated of the season for both sides.

Rounding out the third month of the season, Ole Miss makes a visit to Arkansas, who sits just outside of a national ranking in most preseason polls. The Razorbacks were swept in Oxford last year, but coach Dave Van Horn will be looking to turn things around. The Razorback head man saw the worst record of his 15 years at Arkansas last season, and will be ready to bounce back this season. Redemption for Van Horn could certainly spell trouble for Ole Miss.

The third month of the year will surely prove another major hurdle for the Rebels on their journey to the postseason. Swayze will only be host to eight games this month, so Ole Miss will start to truly make their foray into away games and national-level baseball. Some familiar faces, others not so familiar, will form a challenging, yet utterly exciting April slate.

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- 26 Arcade classic (hyph.)
- 30 Kind of knife
- 32 Cube inventor
- 33 Make easier to swallow
- 37 Byron's works "— and Bess"
- 38 A single time
- 40 Almost
- 42 "Captain Blood" lead
- 43 Nozzle choice
- 44 Karen — (Isak Dinesen)
- 45 Plea at sea

DOWN

- 1 Pinch of salt
- 2 Hairy twin
- 3 Thin wedge
- 4 Vegas game
- 5 — shui
- 6 Juan's gold
- 7 Taken off (2 wds.)
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- 28 Driver with a handle
- 29 Refreshes the fern
- 30 Muscular
- 31 Rod-shaped bacteria (2 wds.)
- 33 Kind of energy
- 34 Black gemstone
- 35 Teen bane
- 36 Dollywood loc.
- 38 Idyllic place
- 41 Fairy-tale word
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- 45 Freight haulers
- 46 Water or rust
- 47 Shopping —
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- 52 Nowhere near
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Spring 2017 Croft Visiting Speaker Series:
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 7:00 p.m.
Joseph C. Bancroft Conference Room, Croft 107

AMY MAHONEY, Croft, Alabama, is the Head of the Counter-Trafficking and Protection Unit for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Washington, DC. Going on thirteen years with IOM, Ms. Mahoney has been involved with a variety of projects and institutional initiatives that focus on counter-trafficking in persons and assistance to vulnerable migrants. Ms. Mahoney has served as an Adjunct Professor on migration related issues at Trinity University. She has an M.A. in International Development from American University in Washington, D.C. and a B.A. in International Studies from the Croft Institute for International Studies at the University of Mississippi.

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SUDOKU®

Puzzles by KrazyDad

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
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16					17			18				
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HOW TO PLAY

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 with no repeats.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

INTERMEDIATE

6	7	8	4	9	2	1	8	5
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8	9	5	1	7	3	6	2	4
2	5	9	7	3	4	8	6	1
7	8	4	6	2	1	5	9	3
3	6	1	9	5	8	7	4	2
4	3	9	5	1	6	2	7	8
9	1	8	2	4	7	3	5	6
5	2	7	3	8	9	4	1	6

SPECIAL TO THE DM

Rebel soccer welcomes nine signees to 2017 class

**MADLINE WEINSTEIN
XINYI SONG**

thedmsports@gmail.com

The Ole Miss women's soccer team officially welcomed nine freshman recruits who are joining the 2017 team on Monday.

The nine new players – Sophie Dineen, Alyssa Frazier, Emily Holten, Grace Johnson, Molly Martin, Sydney Michalak, Madison Smith, Chanel Thomas and Channing Foster -- include four defenders, one midfielder and three forwards.

Assistant coach Melissa Terry said the recruiting process is strict and detailed.

"This is the best recruiting class in 8 years," Terry said.

Terry and the other coaches spend 15 to 20 weekends during the spring and summer on the road looking for the next

additions to their team.

"In terms of qualifications, really, the four things we look at are technical, tactical, physical and psychological – that's more or less the components of the game," she said. "[The] first thing that stands out is athleticism."

Terry said grades are also important.

"We really value student athletes who make school a priority," Terry said. "The grades of players range from 3.64 cumulative GPA with the highest at 3.79if they're competitive in the classroom, and push themselves academically, they're going to hold themselves to the same standards when they show up to train."

Two of the signees, Mary Kate Smith and Julia Phillips, are transfers students from

Jones College and Florida State University, respectively.

"We lost a number of seniors so we (want to) try to make up for as much as we can and with someone who got a year of training from a great program and can really help us right away," Terry said of Phillips.

Upperclassmen Melissa Capocaccia and Courtney Carroll were eager to welcome new members to the team.

Junior midfielder Courtney Carroll from Davidson, North Carolina said each new recruiting class is so different from one another.

"It is a really interesting experience to lose but also acquire new 'family members' each year. Every year is different because we lose and gain different people, which change up the personalities and in turn

change the team dynamic."

Carroll said she is grateful her coaches keep the current players in mind during the recruiting process.

"I think our coaches care a lot about the personalities they are recruiting so while they look for talented soccer players, they tend to focus a lot on how the girls will mesh with the current players," Carroll said. "I am incredibly grateful for that because I think team chemistry is a huge part of any team's success. I do believe if personalities didn't connect well we wouldn't be as successful and I think the coaches think that too."

Senior defense player Melissa Capocaccia from Memphis, Tennessee describes the team as a second family. She said the players challenge each other but also offer support, on and off of the field.

"When new girls come on the team we have to make sure that they understand how our team works," Capocaccia said. "Our team doesn't respond well to drama, so our team as a whole makes sure that it is kept at a minimum. We also have to make sure they feel welcomed to our team so that any issues they have, big or small, can be taken care of."

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WITH PLAYOFFS IN SIGHT FRONT RUNNERS EMERGE FOR NBA

DYLAN BRISTER



1

JAMES HARDEN

28.8 PPG

Fear the beard. D'Antoni seems like a coaching genius after switching the former shooting guard to the point. Averaging 28.8 ppg and 11.5 assists per game, Harden is showing why the coach trusting him with the ball every play is the right move. Despite not averaging a triple double, he is bringing his team to what could be a third place finish in a very difficult West conference and that is where his value comes. Not only does he put up these great stats, he propels his team to perform, even after the loss of former All-Star big man Dwight Howard.



2

RUSSELL WESTBROOK

30.8 PPG

He is actually averaging a triple double this season. Honestly, I could probably stop there. On course to be the first to accomplish the feat since Oscar Robinson in the '64-65 season, the Oklahoma City point man is seemingly superhuman this year. It seems the departure of former MVP forward Kevin Durant has motivated, and enabled, Russ to put these insane numbers up. He has also helped turn two young centers, Adams and Kanter, into experienced big men. His season averages of 30.8 ppg, 10.6 rpg and 10.2 apg, in addition to the efficiency of his front court when they're linking up, make a strong case for Westbrook.



3

LEBRON JAMES

25.8 PPG

He's the best player in the NBA right now. He has been for a while, and probably will be for a while. This doesn't mean he's the MVP. Not to say he couldn't win the award every season, but dealing with a lax East and still having two All Stars on the roster makes it a little tough. A poor run of results throughout January show even with James playing well they aren't unbeatable. You can make the case the Cavs have suffered injuries and have a shallow roster, but still being surrounded by two All Star starters on a usual basis hurts the argument. He'll make his full skillset known around playoff time and possibly take finals MVP, but I think his modest showings this season will leave him waiting until then for the "most valuable" tag.



4

KEVIN DURANT

25.8 PPG

Despite also being surrounded by All Stars, including the first unanimous and reigning MVP, KD somehow has still managed to shine in Oakland. Say what you want about his decision to move away from OKC, he is a phenomenal player. The 6'11" forward has the touch and movement of a guard and the reach of a big man. Durant is averaging 26.3 ppg and 8.4 rpg and shooting a career high 54.6% from the field, showing he impacts the game in multiple ways despite the level of his teammates. His numbers might not be insane, but he is making quite the impact on an already championship-caliber team and that carries some weight.



5

KAWHI LEONARD

25.3 PPG

The Defensive Player of the Year showed his game goes 2 ways this season. Bringing up his ppg average by over four points, Leonard is 10th in the league in scoring. He is shooting nearly 50 percent from the field and an impressive 41.1 percent from the 3-point line, proving he is far from a one-dimensional player. Despite the talent and experience that he shares a roster with, it's still clear that the Spurs are Leonard's team. His finesse, athleticism and defensive prowess drive a strong case for the forward as MVP, especially when considering San Antonio's record.



6

ISIAH THOMAS

29.9 PPG

The All-Star starting spot snub seems to have gotten to IT4 as he has exploded recently. Scoring 35 or more points in four of his last six games, the Celtics guard has done his best to show why he thinks he should be a starter. The Celtics are second in the East, due in no small part to the performances of the Association's leading fourth quarter scorer. The only problem I have with his game is his assist count on big scoring nights, but even that has been improving as of late. If he can keep up the 32.9 ppg he averaged in the month of January, the least valuable pick in the 2011 draft might prove to be the most valuable player in 2017.