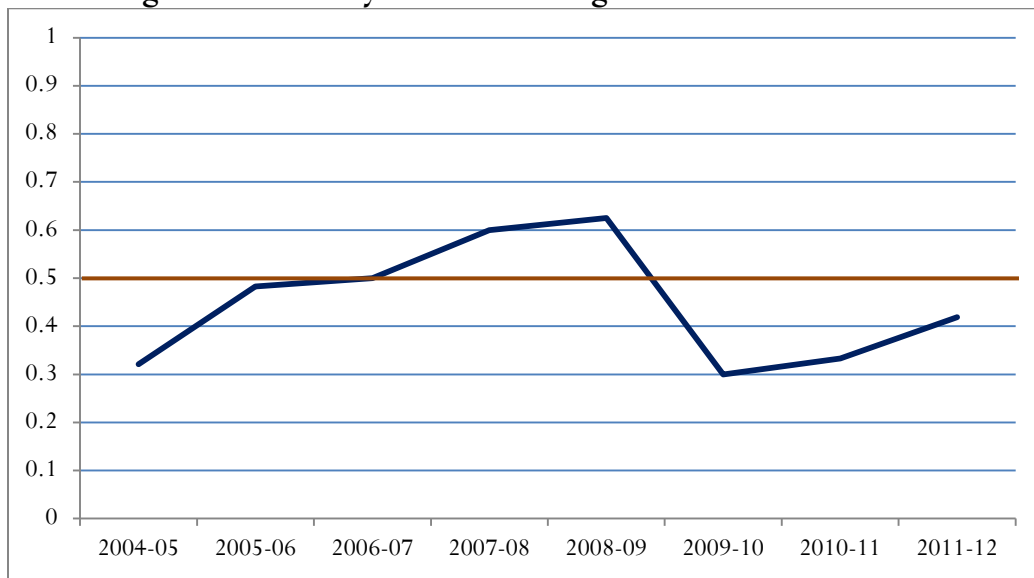


# Too Much Joye in Mudville

*A Guest Editorial by Susan Green-Lewis*

Since coming to “lead” USM’s women’s basketball program back in 2004-05, head coach Joye Lee-McNelis has struggled to rebuild that program to the level that former coach Kay James provided throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Last week’s blowout loss in Hattiesburg at the hands of Hampton actually shows how Lee-McNelis’ problems run deeper than building a power, as James did before. Just winning more games than she loses has proven a nearly impossible task for Lee-McNelis. That first season produced a dismal 9-19 (0.321) record, and it was followed by a modestly better record of 14-15 (0.483) in 2005-06. During her sixth season at the helm in 2009-10, Lee-McNelis “guided” the Lady Eagles to a 9-21 season (0.300), the school’s worst since the mid-1970s, eclipsing Lee-McNelis’ own 9-19 record from 2004-05 on the dismal scale. The 2009-10 disaster was followed in 2010-11 by a record of only 10-20 (0.333), meaning that Lee-McNelis was responsible for “leading” the Lady Eagles basketball program to its three worst individual seasons over the previous 35 years. When last season (2011-12) ended with a record of 13-18 (0.419), fans of the program must have felt as though losing had become a new normal.

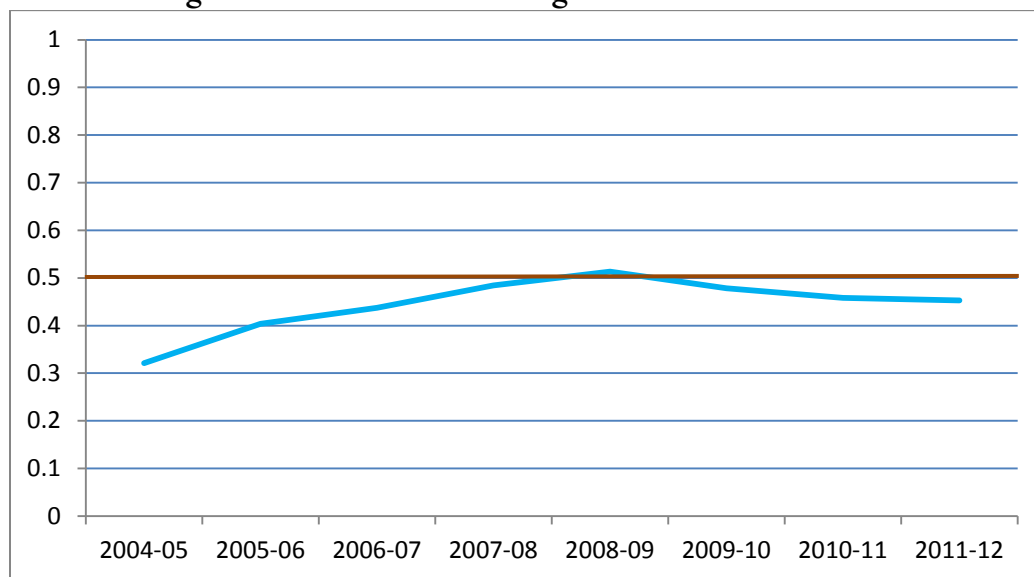
**Figure 1: Season-by-Season Winning Pct. Under Lee-McNelis**



After nine full seasons at the helm, Lee-McNelis has a cumulative record at USM of 111-134 (0.453). It is also worth noting that, as bad as things are, a number of the 111 victories have come against institutions that USM should be somewhat embarrassed to have even scheduled. For example, Lee-McNelis’ third season in 2006-07, her first non-losing season at 15-15 (0.500), was helped along by wins over Jacksonville State, Grambling State, Eastern Kentucky, Cal-Poly, and Centenary. That’s one-third of the total wins on the year, making a huge difference. Still, a portion of the 15 losses that year were accounted for by the likes of Birmingham Southern, Stephen F. Austin, Jackson State, and Texas A&M – Corpus Christi. How sad is that? The next season in 2007-08, only one of two when Lee-McNelis had a winning season (21-14), the Lady Eagles were helped by victories over Sam Houston State, McNeese State, Mercer, North Florida, Austin Peay State, Birmingham Southern, and Illinois – Chicago. Again, that’s one-third of the total wins on the season. However, that “winning” team also lost to Jacksonville State. Over the two subsequent seasons, Lee-McNelis’ squads picked up two (2) wins each over William Carey and Alcorn State, and one

win each over the likes of Sam Houston State, Tennessee State, Nicholls State, Cal State – Northridge, and Jackson State. That’s nine of the 29 total wins over the 2-season period – again about one-third of the total. Still, those two seasons also produced two losses to Arkansas – Little Rock, and one loss each to Louisiana – Monroe, Belmont, South Alabama, and Southeast Missouri State.

**Figure 2: Cumulative Winning Pct. Under Lee-McNelis**



So, this column has identified more than 20 wins, out of a total of 111, that are of suspect quality. This total comes from only a cursory view of the record for these years. This year’s team is 0-1, having lost to Hampton. Keep in mind that contests against South Alabama, Savannah State, Florida A&M, Arkansas – Little Rock, Louisiana – Monroe, Loyola – New Orleans, Tennessee – Martin, Central Arkansas, William Carey, and New Orleans are all on this year’s schedule. Wins against most of these mean almost nothing. Losses to any of these mean almost everything.

It’s time for a new set of eyes – those of new USM athletics director Jeff Hammond – to take a fresh look at this situation. Faculty all over the USM campus are struggling daily to maintain program-level accreditations at the regional and national levels. Why should Lee-McNelis be allowed to run an “unaccredited” sports program for an entire decade and then continue beyond that?