Five games—and five losses—into the 2008-2009 UT Chattanooga mens basketball season, there was very little hope that the Mocs could turn things around and still salvage a successful season.

From the very first tip-off things began to head south for Chattanooga, as just one minute into their opening game against the University of Tennessee, senior Kevin Goffney suffered an injury that would keep him sidelined until mid-December. The Mocs went on to lose to their opener to the Vols 114-75, which began a five game losing streak UTC finished November with losses to Missouri 103-75, Memphis 83-71, Southern California 73-46, and Fairfield, 61-42.

The Mocs were down, but not out.

Although their 0-5 record did not show it, UTC had faced the meat of their schedule—four of their five losses had been at the hands of NCAA Tournament teams, two of which advanced to the Sweet 16 (Missouri and Memphis). On November 29, Chattanooga tasted their first victory with a convincing 108-67 win over Tennessee Temple. The following game, facing Stephen Curry and the Davidson Wildcats, was an early indicator that the Mocs weren’t giving up on their season. Chattanooga showed their resiliency rallying from a 14 point deficit with 2:21 remaining, thanks to a 17-5 run that brought the game within two points with 30 seconds remaining. Although Davidson went on to win the game, seniors Stephen McDowell and Kevin Goffney—in his first game back—combined for 46 points, falling just short to the No. 22 Wildcats 100-95 in his first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2005.

Although UTC finished their season on a three game skid, with losses to Charleston, Appalachian State, and Western Carolina, Chattanooga still received an opening round bye in the Southern Conference Tournament—hosted by Chattanooga—earning the top seed in the North division.

In their SoCon Tournament opener, Chattanooga, led by Kevin Goffney’s 18 points and 7 rebounds, the Mocs were able to defeat Elon in a nail-biter, 79-78, advancing to the semifinals to face Samford. Led by senior Nicchaeus Doaks’ double-double—21 points and 12 rebounds—the win improved Chattanooga’s record to 14-13 (10-6).

With the regular season and conference tournament behind them, UTC advanced to the NCAA Championships for the first time since 2005, however their tournament appearance would be short lived, falling to Connecticut 103-47.
SMALL SCHOOLS IN THE BIG DANCE

Roland Chapman

At the beginning of every college basketball season every school, big or small believes that they can win a national championship. Because college basketball has a tournament style post season it does not matter if the school is in a power conferences like the Big Ten, SEC, Pac Ten, or if they belong to a smaller conference like the SoCon or a Mid-Major, each team has a chance to go dancing at the end of the year. The smaller teams like UTC must win their conference championship game while the teams in the bigger conferences do not necessarily have to. Because the conferences like the Big Ten have had such good teams and only 65 teams are allowed into the tournament, some people feel that the bigger schools should get more bids, thus taking away the bids from the smaller schools and that would be a big mistake.

When people think of March Madness they think of smaller teams upsetting bigger schools and shocking the sporting world. The term “Cinderella story” was coined for the smaller schools that would go as far they could before, like Cinderella, their story would end. If every team in the tournament is a big conference school there will be no more Cinderella stories and that would ruin much of the excitement of watching the tournament in my opinion. For me, most of the fun of watching March Madness is that you never know who is going to advance. On paper Cleveland State had no chance of beating power house Kansas—or George Mason—who made it all the way to the Final Four, before losing to the eventual national champions Florida—will take the opportunity they are given and go really far and people all around the nation will find themselves cheering for the underdog to beat the big school, and that is what March Madness is all about; allowing the little guy to have their time in the spotlight.

No matter how much of a mountain another team’s reputation may be, with the cheers and hopes of the fans, that team pales in comparison when facing the Mocs. Because, unlike other schools, Moc fans don’t just stand behind their team only when they are winning, only when the star player is recruited, or only when the cameras are rumored to be out for the game. They are supporters every time a player comes into view.

Players are not only role models to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga but students, friends, roommates and study partners. In essence, players are like family to the campus community and so they are respected and treated as such. That’s what makes the fans on this campus such an important asset to all the players on campus. When asked repeatedly, “Why do you all support your team so much?” The response is always the same. “Because I am a Moc.” Just as simple as that, it is understood to the person asking the question how important being a Moc fan is on the campus.

FAN SUPPORT AT UTC

Joshua Jackson