

April 18, 2007

Remarkable Blue Raider rally falls just short in playoff

Freshman Smith SBC Individual Champion

MT Media Relations

ORLANDO, Fla. - If championships were decided based on guts, determination, and resiliency, Middle Tennessee would have won its first Sun Belt Conference Men's Golf Championship running away at the Walt Disney World's Magnolia Course this week.

· **Photos:** [Round Three Gallery](#)

Unfortunately, those qualities didn't determine the outcome of this week's tournament and the Blue Raiders suffered a grueling one-shot loss in a sudden death playoff after an extraordinary run Wednesday.

Trailing by 13 shots after the first round, Middle Tennessee stormed from behind and found itself tied with Louisiana-Lafayette after 54 holes. Unfortunately, for the Blue Raiders, the Ragin' Cajuns' Michael Smith sank a 6-foot birdie putt on the final shot of the playoff hole to send his team to the title, which carries an automatic berth into the NCAA Championships.

"I'm so proud of this team," said head men's coach Johnny Moore, who was named the Sun Belt's Coach of the Year. "We didn't give a championship away, but we almost took one. It was a fight to the end, and I couldn't be more pleased with how our guys played. I'm just so disappointed for the guys, I really am. I'm not disappointed in how they played and their effort because what else could you ask? We shoot 7-under par in the last round and that's all you can do."

Freshman standout [Craig Smith](#) continued to tame the difficult course Wednesday with a 6-under 66, and he finished 5-under 216 to earn low medalist honors. Smith also earned All-Sun Belt Conference and Freshman of the Year.

Seldom does a freshman play with such poise and confidence with so much on the line, but Smith concluded his sterling tournament run with another bogey-free round Wednesday. The Springfield, Tenn., native did not have a bogey in the final 36 holes.

"Remarkable," Moore said. "For a freshman in your first conference championship to go out there and not make a bogey the last two days, that's golf in your golf ball."

All of Middle Tennessee's players had game when the most was at stake Tuesday and Wednesday. Freshman [Kent Bulle](#) shot 1-under 71 Wednesday and finished at 7-over 223 for the tournament, and sophomore [Chas Narramore](#), an All-Sun Belt Conference selection, shot 1-over Wednesday and finished even for the tournament.

Another sophomore standout in the Blue Raider stable, [Rick Cochran](#), was even Wednesday and finished 7-over in the tournament. Senior [Spencer Provow](#) also went out strong, shooting even par Wednesday.

Middle Tennessee had whittled a 13-shot deficit to six behind New Orleans and one behind Louisiana-Lafayette heading into the final round. The Blue Raiders put the heat on the field by shooting 9-under on the front and they kept it going on the back.

One of the shots of the tournament came from Smith on the par-5 14 when he chipped in an eagle from the bunker. It was the highlight of his career-best round.

"I got to hitting it pretty good and felt comfortable over the ball," Smith said. "I was confident in what I was doing and that was the main thing. We stayed right there with it and never gave up. We did real well but it just didn't quite work out for us."

The thrilling final round came down to the 18th hole and the gallery was treated to a sensational fight to the finish. In the clubhouse at 7-under, New Orleans missed a putt to tie and the Blue Raiders' fate rested on the putter of Louisiana-Lafayette's Peter Badawy. A successful putt would land the Ragin' Cajuns the title, but a two-putt would force the sudden death playoff.

Badawy two-putted and Middle Tennessee's hopes were still alive.

All five Blue Raiders were even on the par-4 16th. It came down to one final shot and Smith stood six feet from the hole eying a birdie putt for the title. His putt was true and the resounding run put on the Blue Raiders was curtailed.



Middle Tennessee head men's golf coach Johnny Moore, right, is presented the Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year Award by Sun Belt Assisant Commissioner Bryant Carter. (Bradley Lambert)

"After the first day I just told the guys to try to cut a little off at a time and they did," Moore said. "They made up seven shots on the second day and six more in the final round. These guys really got after it. The program is in good shape. These guys returning have been through the battles and they know how to do it. This conference better get out of the way of these boys because they are going to make some noise for the next couple of years."

Sun Belt Conference Golf Championships

Final Round Scores

Walt Disney World's Magnolia Golf Course

Orlando, Fla.

T1 Middle Tennessee 298-290-281 869

T1 Louisiana-Lafayette 297-290-282 869

3 New Orleans 285-297-288 870

4 Denver 297-294-287 878

5 North Texas 296-294-291 881

6 Western Kentucky 303-294-296 893

7 Troy 307-304-287 898

8 South Alabama 304-303-296 903

9 Arkansas State 308 303 294 905

10 Louisiana-Monroe 308-305-306 919

11 UALR 318-308-298 924

12 Florida Atlantic 311-310-306 927

MT Team Scores

T1 Middle Tennessee 298-290-281 869

1 [Craig Smith](#) 76-69-66 211

T6 [Chas Narramore](#) 71-72-73 216

T19 [Rick Cochran](#) 78-73-72 223

T19 [Kent Bulle](#) 76-76-71 223

T36 [Spencer Provow](#) 75-82-72 229

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