

Lady Raider Tennis Opens with Austin Peay

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Coach Randy Holden believes that this year's women's tennis team is the tightest knit team that he has ever had at Middle Tennessee and that gives him a great deal to be optimistic about for the upcoming spring season. "Teams that are so close might not be the best teams, but I really like our chances this year," Holden said. "The close-knit teams seem to always find a way to make it happen." The Lady Raiders return five players to this year's squad, including three seniors: Manon Kruse, Carien Venter and Laura McNamara. Leading the way is Kruse, a three-time All-Sun Belt performer, who enters the spring season ranked No. 54 in singles by the ITA. Kruse, a native of Hamm, Germany, finished the 2003 spring season at 21-6 as a singles player and advanced to the



NCAA Championships in singles and in doubles for the second year in a row. Kruse fell in the first round of singles competition at the 2003 NCAA Championships to 10th-ranked Jewell Patterson of Southern California 3-6, 5-7. In doubles Kruse and teammate Stacy Varnell, who left Middle Tennessee as the all-time leader in doubles wins with 86, fell to the third-ranked team of Sarah Riske and Alex Tsoubanos of Vanderbilt 1-6, 4-6. In singles play during the 2003 fall season Kruse reached the semi-finals of the Rivera ITA All-American Championships in Pacific Palisades, California, falling to No. 84 Lauren Perl of San Diego 6-3, 6-4. Kruse also reached the semi-finals of the ITA Southeast Regional before bowing out to Wake Forest's Alex Hirsch 6-1, 6-3. Kruse and her new doubles partner, Venter (Pretoria, South Africa), are ranked No. 30 in the ITA doubles rankings to start the spring season. Kruse and Venter reached the semi-finals of the qualifying round at the Rivera ITA All-Americans during the fall 2003 season, falling to 12th-ranked Danele Alvarez and Alix Lacelarie of Clemson 9-7. The duo also reached the semi-finals of the ITA Southeast Regional before falling 8-3 to Clemson's Mario Brito and Julie Coin. McNamara (Melbourne, Australia) won her first tournament as a Lady Raider in the fall when she won the Flight B singles title at the MT Fall

Invitational. McNamara and junior Jennifer Klaschka (Kaufering, Germany), who were 16-1 as doubles partners in the spring of 2003, won the Flight A doubles title at the MT Fall Invitational. Klaschka won the Flight Two singles title at the Furman Fall Invitational during the fall season as well. The final returnee, Emily Vest (Germantown, TN), a top 60 player in the South, played at the No. 6 position for the Lady Raiders last spring and went 4-5 in singles play during the fall. The two newcomers to Middle Tennessee are Ana Maria Cibils (Montevideo, Uruguay) and Jacqui Williams (Canberra, Australia). Cibils, a junior, played two years at Tennessee Tech as the No. 2 Singles player and was named All-OVC in both of her years at the school. Williams, the only freshman on this year's squad, ended the fall season with a 4-4 record, managing to garner a win in the Flight Seven Championship at the Furman Invitational with a 6-4, 0-6, 6-2 win over Clemson's Ashlea Bowen during the fall season. The Lady Raiders finished last season 11-11 as a team, but Holden, who is 34-33 overall in four years at Middle Tennessee, thinks that not having to open up against a top-25 caliber team will be more conducive to the Lady Raiders experiencing success over the course of the year. "The past two years we have opened up with a top-10 team (Vanderbilt)," Holden said. "Getting to play a game at home before we go on the road to face No. 15 Kentucky will help us out a lot." "We usually have been a little rusty at the beginning of the year, but having a game at home to start the season might be very advantageous for us as a team." Middle Tennessee begins dual match play at 6 p.m. Thursday at the Murfreesboro Racquet Club against former OVC conference foe Austin Peay. The Lady Raiders are 25-1 all-time against the Lady Governors. This will be the first time in two years that the Lady Raiders have opened the spring season at home.

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