Blue Raider Softball Season Ends

2007 team achieves most-ever Sun Belt Conference victories

May 14, 2007 · David Powell

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee softball's season came to an end on Saturday as the hosts dropped two straight games to Sun Belt Conference champions Florida Atlantic at the SBC tournament in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Despite the disappointment of being eliminated in postseason play, the performance put on by the Blue Raiders during the 2007 season ranks among greatest in school history. MT finished the season with an overall record of 30-30, including going 14-9 in conference play. This season's record is evidence of the ever-improving results seen under Head Coach Leigh Podlesny. During her first season under the helm in 2005, the Blue Raiders went 8-43 overall, including just one win in conference play. In 2006, they improved to 19-42-1, picking up six conference victories. Their stellar 2007 conference mark ranks as their best-ever record since joining the Sun Belt Conference in 2001, surpassing the 11 wins achieved by the 2004 Blue Raiders under former head coach Cindy Connelley. It is their 5th best record, regardless of conference, since 1993. The team was led on the offensive side of the ball by junior-college transfer Whitney Darlington. The Tullahoma, Tenn. native began her first season as a Blue Raider with a bang, leading the team in home runs (8), RBI (38), triples (2), slugging percentage (.577), total bases (94) and multi-hit games (16). She was second on the team in batting average (.331), hits (54), doubles (12) and stolen bases (19). The team finished with their best batting average (.270) since 2004, when they posted a school-record .300 BA. Defensively, Middle Tennessee was directed by two players. Senior Shelby Stiner led the team in assists (189) and the conference in assists in a single game (11). Sophomore Martha Davis was led the team in outfield assists (10), more than all other MT outfielders combined. The Sun Belt Conference all-second team selection's highlight-reel catches became the norm at Blue Raider Field and saved countless runs from crossing the plate. Both players supplied the defensive backbone for the Blue Raiders to provide the most assists (702) and turn the most double

plays (23) in school history. They finished the regular season ranked 26th nationally in double plays per game (0.39) This season's team assists surpassed the previous high of 560 achieved during the 2006 season. Blue Raider speed demon and University of Tennessee transfer Ashley Cline led the team and the conference in stolen bases. Her 32 swipes ranked 24th nationally and helped MT end the regular season 16th nationally and 1st in the conference in stolen bases per game with 1.82. The Gallatin, Tenn. native was honored at the end of the season as a second team all-conference selection. Freshman Lindsey Vander Lugt finished her first season at Middle Tennessee in the record books. With her four strikeout performance on April 4th, 2007, she became the first freshman pitcher to go over 100 strikeouts in a season since Stayc Preator in the year 2000. The Olympia, Wash. native finished the season fanning 146 batters and now sits 2nd in school history for inning pitched (273.2) and appearances (52) in a season. She finished the season tied for 50th nationally in wins with 19. Seniors Melissa Weiland and Muriel Ledbetter completed their eligibility this season ranking 2nd and 3rd respectively in the school's career home runs list. Their combined seven home runs during the 2007 season helped belt the Blue Raiders to a school-record 39 home runs on the season. Ledbetter also finished the season ranking 1st in career walks (88), 2nd in career hits (146) and 2nd in career doubles (37). Her five doubles in 2007 contributed to the Blue Raiders ranking 26th nationally in doubles per game with 0.26. The future certainly looks bright for Blue Raiders as they return nine regular starters in the field and all but three players to the team in 2008. Among the returnees are all-conference second team selections Martha Davis and Ashley Cline as well as 2007 conference newcomer-of-the-year candidate Whitney Darlington.

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