

February 17, 2008

Rhoden announces deep, talented signing class 10 new players join Blue Raiders

MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee soccer coach Aston Rhoden has announced the 2008 signing class and it includes incredible depth with 10 players entering the Blue Raider program.



(MT) 

The signing class includes Laura Lamberth (White House, Tenn.), Elisabeth Sikes (Huntsville, Ala.), Jenna Bowers (Chandler, Az.), Charity Blair (Chattanooga, Tenn.), Jessica Heckman (Overland Park, Kan.), Ashli Julien (Columbus, Ga.), Heather McDonnell (Bedfordshire, England), Regina Thomas (Centennial, Colo.), Alyssa Palmacci (Plano, Texas), and Hope Suominen (Pontypridd, Wales).

Lamberth, a midfielder who prepped at Goodpasture High School earned five letters in soccer as she started for the varsity team as an eighth grader. She was named to the Tennessee Athletic Coaches Association team in 2006 and 2007 and she was named to the Tennessee Sports Writers Association All-State team in 2007. Lamberth is a four-time All-District selection.

Lamberth holds eight school records, including career goals (88), goals in a season (28 in 2007), goals in a game (6), four-goal games in career (six), and career assists (44).

"Laura comes to us as a proven winner having played her club soccer with six-time Tennessee state champion, Real Madrid Soccer Club," Rhoden said. "She is a very technical player who has great passing range and is very strong in the air. Her versatility will be an asset to our team."

Heckman helped lead St. Thomas Aquinas to the Kansas 6A state championship in 2004 and 5A state titles in 2006 and 2007.

"Jessica is another great addition to our defensive unit," Rhoden said. "She is a hard-nosed defender capable of playing several positions in the back. Her durability and versatility will be an asset to the team."

Another highly-decorated player in the class is defender Jenna Bowers, who is a three-time All-State selection at Seton Catholic (Ariz.) High School. The 2008 All-State team has yet to be announced. Bowers was named Defender of the Year and MVP of the three-time state champs. Bowers also has helped lead her team to four region titles. Seton Catholic is currently in the state's final four.

Seton Catholic is 82-15-2 in the last four years entering the semifinals. She has 13 goals and two assists this season, which is a school record for a defender.

"Jenna is a strong defender who is very strong in the air," Rhoden said. "She reads the game extremely well and is a great leader on the field. She has great presence on the field and will provide good leadership in the back."

Another addition to the defense is Sikes, who was named Grissom High School's best defender as the Huntsville, Ala., team captured the Class 6A state championship in 2007. Sikes was named MVP of the state tournament. She also was named honorable mention all-state and has been selected to play in the North-South All-Star game.

"Elisabeth is a very versatile defender who gets forward in the attack really well," Rhoden said. "She is a solid defender who reads the game extremely well and is capable of scoring from deep positions. Her awareness of when to get forward in the attack will give us more attacking options."

Thomas packs scoring punch and was the leading scorer at Grandview High School in Centennial, Colo., for three straight years (16 goals, 14 assists). She is a member of the Colorado ODP team (2001-07) and the ODP traveling team.

"Regina is a very skillful and crafty striker," Rhoden said. "She is strong on the dribble and despite her size she is very good in the air. Her 1-v-1 attacking abilities will create tremendous challenges for opposing defenders."

Palmacci is another high-scoring forward entering the Blue Raider fold. She scored 101 career goals at Prestonwood Christian Academy in Plano, Texas and led the state in goals in 2006 and 2007. She is a two-time All-State selection.

"Alyssa is a solid forward and is very good in and around the box," Rhoden said. "Her mobility and ability to play with her back to goal will be an asset to our attack."

Blair earned varsity letters three years at Girls Prep School in Chattanooga, as well as her freshman season at Chattanooga Christian. The versatile defender was named to the Chattanooga Times-Free Press Best of the Preps after helping lead her team into the state semifinals.

"Charity is a very smart defender with good technical abilities," Rhoden said. "She is a very versatile player and will give us tremendous depth in several positions. Charity is capable of playing either side of the field and can be an attacking threat from deep positions."

Julien is a strong forward and her 30 goals at Hardaway High School in Columbus, Ga., are second most. She is a four-year letterwinner.

"Ashli will be a strong attacking player for us" Rhoden said. "She can break down the opponent's defense with her pace and 1-v-1 attacking skills. Her ability to play in central and wide positions will give us more depth in the attack."

Suominen should provide immediate help in midfield. She is a member of the Keynsham Ladies FC U-19 team in England as well as a member of the national team.

"Hope is a strong central midfielder with tremendous work ethic and keen tactical awareness," Rhoden said. "She is a great leader on the field and has exceptional work rate. Hope will make us more flexible in midfield."

McDonnell is also expected to add versatility to the Blue Raider scoring attack. The forward is a member of the Watford FC Club team and attended Vandyke Upper Secondary in England.

"Heather is a very skillful and tricky player with great vision," Rhoden said. "She has great pace and can play in central or wide positions. She is a great leader on the field and has exceptional work rate. Heather will provide us with several different attacking options."