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## Blue Raiders Ready for 2008 Opening Pitch MT opens the season at Jacksonville State

MT Media Relations



Junior Rawley Bishop will help guide new faces in the infield this season.



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**MURFREESBORO, TENN.** - The Middle Tennessee baseball team will open the 2008 season this weekend against Jacksonville State.

The Blue Raiders will begin the 2008 season by facing JSU for the third consecutive year. Middle Tennessee is 5-4 when opening a season against the Gamecocks.

In 2007, the Blue Raiders won the opening game of the series 12-1 but lost the next two. In 2006, Middle Tennessee swept the series to begin the season.

"Jacksonville has a history of very good baseball. They were national champions on the Division II level and when they went Division I, joined the OVC and were immediately successful," head coach Steve Peterson said.

JSU has been picked to win the Ohio Valley Conference in 2008 with 76 total points as voted on the league coaches.

JSU outfielder Clay Whitmore has been picked Preseason Player of the Year after being named Player of the Year in 2007 after hitting .391 with 93 hits, 53 runs and 69 RBI. Whitmore joins Bishop on the Brooks Wallace National Player of the Year Watch List.

"They have had regional experience and are a good opponent. It is a good place to play because they will test you. Their pitching is always and they make good adjustments during a three game series," Peterson said. "Our hitters have to be aggressive and smart to understand what their pitchers are doing. It is a formidable test and will be some good ball games."

Junior **Rawley Bishop** returns to first base as one of just two infielders from a year ago. Bishop ended the 2007 season tied for fourth on the team as he batted .329 with 70 hits, 17 home runs, 15 doubles and 65 RBI.

"He is the veteran and defensively is one of the best first baseman we've had and we have had some good ones. Rawley gives you what you want a first base a guy with power who can drive runs in. Defensively, he is going to help our infield because he is tall, stretches well, handles picks and digs balls out of the dirt. He is going to save them a lot on bad throws," Peterson said.

Bishop received Second Team All-Sun Belt honors in 2007 and was named to the SBC All-Tournament team. This season he was named to the Preseason All-Sun Belt team and the 2008 Brooks Wallace National Player of the Year Award Watch List. Bishop is just one of three Sun Belt players named to the 2008 Brooks Wallace Player of the Year Watch List.

"As far as hitting, Rawley is an extremely hard hitter. He wants to play the game when he is done with college and is one pace to do that. Where I have confidence in Rawley is if he gets off to a great start it won't go to his head. If he gets off to a poor start offensively he will just work harder. He has always been a hard worker and will be a hard worker no

matter what," Peterson said.

The Blue Raiders will see a number of new faces on the mound in 2008 as some return from injuries and the addition of others. Senior **Brad Robinson** will help guide the untested talent as he was the Friday night starter in 2007. Robinson posted a 4.00 ERA with an 8-2 record in 16 appearances with team high 74 strikeouts.

"If you go back and look at the history since I have been here very rarely is what you see at the beginning what you get later on. There are changes. I am leaving some guys home who deserve to go as much as others but in the Sun Belt you are limited to 28 players on overnight trips so I can not take everyone," Peterson said. "With **Brad Robinson** not in the starting rotation but the plan is to bring him along and he will get back in it, which will cause a lot of changes."

Sophomore **Kenneth Roberts** performed well in the fall and after pitching just seven innings in 2007 will see significantly more playing time.

"I am really excited about Kenny Roberts. He has had a very good summer, fall and preseason. He has definitely been our best pitcher and has earned this opportunity with no reputation. It is going to be interesting to see how he goes about his business. I expect him because he is not a very emotional guy, to go out and see if his stuff his good enough to beat Jacksonville. I think we have his pitch count where he should have the opportunity to get into the fifth or sixth inning," Peterson said.

"Then it gets down to the bullpen. All of our championship teams have had outstanding middle relief. The closer has been a closer by committee so I am not worried about that."

Opening pitch for Friday's game is set for 3 p.m. at Rudy Abbot Field in Jacksonville, Ala. First pitch on Saturday, Feb. 23 and Sunday, Feb.24 is set for 1 p.m.

There will be no radio broadcasts of this weekend's series but live stats will be available as linked on [www.goblueraiders.com](http://www.goblueraiders.com). A video stream of each game may also be found on [www.ovcsports.com](http://www.ovcsports.com).

**The Series:** MT leads 19-13; Peterson is 16-10 against the Gamecocks

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