

# Near-record round puts Blue Raiders in NCAA National Championship

## Golfers among top 10 teams advancing from East Regional

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**CHATTANOOGA** - Middle Tennessee's golf team needed a strong third round to reach its first NCAA National Championship entering the final round of the East Regional at Council Fire Golf Course in Chattanooga Saturday. The Blue Raiders delivered it, providing one of the best rounds in school history with a 2-under 282 to finish ninth in the East Regional and advance into the NCAA National Championship, hosted by Purdue, in West Lafayette, Ind., May 28-31. Middle Tennessee entered the final round tied for 10th with Michigan State and four shots ahead of 12th-place Duke, also its playing partners for the decisive final round. Not only did the Blue Raiders stand toe-to-toe with what appeared to be their chief competition entering the round, but they also outplayed them, beating



the Spartans by five shots and the Blue Devils by 13. "I am so proud of these guys. They not only deserve this, but they also went out and earned it," Middle Tennessee first-year Head Coach Whit Turnbow. "They have worked hard for this opportunity and it is a great accomplishment not only for them, but also for our athletic department, our University, and we are looking forward to representing the Sun Belt Conference on the greatest stage in all of college golf. There are only 30 teams left playing and we are one of them. That's a pretty good statement for our program." The statement was made on the course Saturday and the most resounding spark was lit by Rick Cochran. The junior standout from Paducah, Ky., tied his career low with a 4-under 67 on the strength of eight birdies and finished the tournament tied for 17th with a 4-under 209, tied for 17th individually. After opening with a 1-over 72, Cochran played the course at 5-under the rest of the way. "I'm mentally

exhausted," Cochran said upon completing his sterling round. "It was hard because I was representing more than myself, I was representing Middle Tennessee out here and that's a lot of pressure under these circumstances, but at the same time the round was easy. I didn't make many mistakes out there and I putted well. I had four bogeys and two of them I can live with but I just made some dumb mistakes on the other two." Junior Chas Narramore, playing in his second consecutive NCAA East Regional, was even Saturday and 3-under 210 for the tournament, tied for 22nd. Sophomore Kent Bulle withstood the pressure of his first NCAA Regional and closed with a 1-under 70 and was 1-under 212 for the tournament, tied for 34th, while Nick Bailes tied for 80th with a 217 and freshman Jason Millard tied for 111th with a 222. "Personally, I would have liked to finish better," said Narramore, whose round would have been stellar if not for finishing with a bogey on No. 8 and a double on No. 9 - his closing holes. "At the same time this is a team sport and we all picked one another up today, and we are a part of Middle Tennessee history. It's a great feeling and it helps erase the feeling that has been with us since last year when we fell just short (of reaching a NCAA Regional). I'm really proud of how our team responded to a big challenge today. I think it speaks to our character and our ambition." The Blue Raiders were among the top 10 teams all three rounds but when they needed to be at their best, they were. The historic run; however, was put on hold early as the tournament was delayed 2-1/2 hours due to fog at the outset. It only delayed the inevitable where Middle Tennessee was concerned. The Blue Raiders fired a collective 21 birdies en route to the second-best 54-hole score (282) in school history and the tournament total 6-under 846 was second all-time for 54 holes. Cochran's career low 67 is tied for the 13th lowest round for an individual and his 4-under 209 was good enough for sixth lowest all-time. Cochran canvassed a masterpiece and has his putter purring as he racked up his eight birdies, including three on his first four holes to start one of the best rounds ever produced by a Blue Raider linkster. His 20-foot putt for birdie on the par-3 seventh was one of many outstanding plays he fashioned on the greens Saturday. Narramore also had his moments with five birdies and was within inches of five more on near-misses, while also having a chip for an eagle rim out of the cup. He was part of Middle Tennessee's strong stretch at the turn with four straight birdies during one sizzling stretch. "You expect your leaders to step up in the clutch and that's what Rick and Chas did today," Turnbow said. "They are juniors and have played in more tournaments for us than any of the other players. They are good golfers and good people with strong character so I had no doubt what they would come out and do for the team today." While impressive shots were aplenty, one of the best of the day by any player was turned in by Bulle. His eagle on the par-5 13 was one of the day's highlights. The sophomore from Glasgow, Ky., was also key in Middle Tennessee's strong finish. He secured birdies on two of the first three holes after the turn and was part of knocking home a combined 10 Blue Raider birdies on the opening five holes after the turn, which proved to be the five decisive holes as Middle Tennessee began to separate from the competition. Georgia, the No. 1 overall seed, won the East Regional in convincing fashion. The Bulldogs finished at 41-under, 21 shots ahead of second-place Augusta State. UC-Irvine, Mississippi State, UAB, Auburn, Charlotte, East Tennessee State and Virginia, along with Middle Tennessee, are the 10 advancing teams from the East Regional. Middle Tennessee and East Tennessee are the only remaining in-state teams amongst the 30-team NCAA Championship field.

#### **NCAA East Regional**

#### **Council Fire Golf Course, Par-71**

#### **Chattanooga, Tenn.**

#### **Final Team Scores**

- 1 Georgia 265-271-275 811 -41
- 2 Augusta State 273-282-277 832 -20
- 3 UC-Irvine 283-275-278 836 -16

4 Mississippi State 278-282-278 838 -14  
5 UAB 287-274-278 839 -6  
6 Auburn 281-277-272 840 -12  
7 Charlotte 281-282-281 844 -8  
8 East Tennessee St. 286-283-276 845 -7  
**9 Middle Tennessee 278-286-282 846 -6**  
10 Virginia 286-287- 273 -3  
11 Michigan State 285-279-287 851 -1  
T12 Tenn.-Chattanooga 282-281-290 853 +1  
T12 New Mexico St. 280-281-292 853 +1  
14 North Carolina St. 279-296-280 855 +3  
15 Virginia Tech 281-291-286 858 +6  
16 South Carolina 288-293-278 859 +7  
17 Georgia State 287-286-288 861 +9  
18 North Florida 293-288-281 862 +10  
19 Duke 286-282-295 863 +11  
T20 Memphis 289-291-284 864 +12  
T20 Western Carolina 285-289-290 864 +12  
22 Coastal Carolina 285-291-289 865 +13  
T23 SMU 276-295-295 866 +14  
T23 Colorado St. 282-293-291 866 +14  
25 Mississippi 293-291-287 871 +19  
26 Western Illinois 293-292-290 875 +23  
27 Jackson St. 302-334-312 948 +96  
**10 Middle Tennessee (846)**  
T17 Rick Cochran 72-70-67 209 -4  
T22 Chas Narramore 69-70-71 210 -3  
T34 Kent Bulle 67-75-70 212 -1  
T80 Nick Bailes 70-73-74 217 +4  
T111 Jason Millard 75-73-74 222 +9

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