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Quality foes to visit Blue Raider Field in 2008 Vanderbilt, Ole Miss, Texas Tech among non-conference teams on soccer schedule

MT Media Relations



Blue Raider soccer players hope to give their fans a lot to smile about during the 2008 campaign. (MT) 

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee home success on the soccer pitch has been at an all-time high under Head Coach Aston Rhoden and that's important because the 2008 schedule is filled with quality home opponents.

Contests against two SEC programs and a perennial Big 12 power highlight the non-conference portion of the 2008 schedule, announced by Rhoden this week.

Middle Tennessee will play 10 home matches, including contests with SEC foes Vanderbilt and Ole Miss, and Big 12 opponent Texas Tech also visits the Blue Raider Soccer Field. Local rival Belmont also is on the home schedule, along with Sun Belt members Troy, South Alabama, Louisiana-Monroe and Louisiana-Lafayette.

Additionally, the Blue Raiders face Jacksonville State, Conference USA member Tulsa, Oral Roberts, and seven Sun Belt members on the road.

"We have always tried to schedule opponents like these that we feel will prepare our team for competition in our league as well as if we should get into the NCAA Tournament," Rhoden said. "There are no easy games in the Sun Belt and that's why we schedule non-conference games accordingly. We feel every non-conference opponent we schedule is similar to one or more of the teams we will play in the Sun Belt and some of these opponents are similar to teams we could play in the region should we get into the NCAA Tournament."

Rhoden, whose teams have fashioned a sterling 45-7-2 home record in his six seasons at the helm, says there are a number of variables to explain why Middle Tennessee has been able to attract such quality non-conference opponents to visit Murfreesboro in recent years.

"To play two SEC schools and a Big 12 program at our facility is really big for us because we have never had that many coming to play us at home," Rhoden said. "We generally have to play them on the road but the level of competition in the conference is getting tougher to where teams want to play our teams, and our new facility certainly has made a difference."

Middle Tennessee will open the season with an exhibition game against Austin Peay, Aug. 16, at Blue Raider Field, before traveling to Jacksonville State for the season opener, Aug. 23.

The Blue Raiders will play Vanderbilt in the home opener, Aug. 29, before facing local rival Belmont, Aug. 31.

Middle Tennessee will once again play host to its College Classic the weekend of Sept. 5-7, with Alabama A&M, High Point and Texas Tech providing the competition. The Blue Raiders will play Texas Tech (Sept. 5) and High Point (Sept. 7).

After a weekend road swing to Oklahoma to face Tulsa (Sept. 12) and Oral Roberts (Sept. 14) in the Tulsa Tournament, the Blue Raiders return home to play Ole Miss in the final non-conference match of the regular season.

"It's a great tune-up for us," Rhoden said of the Ole Miss contest. "We have a string of

outstanding competition that will prepare us for league play and then to face a team of Ole Miss' caliber the weekend before we get into Sun Belt Conference play will certainly help further prepare us for the quality competition that lies ahead."

Middle Tennessee opens Sun Belt play on the road against Florida International and Florida Atlantic before playing the first of just four league home matches against Troy (Oct. 3) and South Alabama (Oct. 5).

After traveling to Arkansas to face Arkansas State (Oct. 10) and UALR (Oct. 12), Middle Tennessee concludes its home schedule against Louisiana-Monroe (Oct. 17) and Louisiana-Lafayette (Oct. 19) on "Senior Weekend."

The Blue Raiders close the season with tough tests at North Texas (Oct. 24), Denver (Oct. 26) and Western Kentucky (Oct. 31). The Sun Belt Conference Championships will be hosted by North Texas, Nov. 5-8.

2008 Middle Tennessee Soccer Schedule

Aug. 16 Austin Peay # 7 PM
 Aug. 23 at Jacksonville St. 6:30 PM
 Aug. 29 Vanderbilt 6:30 PM
 Aug. 31 Belmont 1 PM
 Sept. 5 Texas Tech ^ 6:30 PM
 Sept. 7 High Point ^ 1:30 PM
 Sept. 12 at Tulsa & 7 PM
 Sept. 14 vs. Oral Roberts & 11 AM
 Sept. 19 Ole Miss 6:30 PM
 Sept. 26 at Florida International * 7 PM
 Sept. 28 at Florida Atlantic * 12 PM
 Oct. 3 Troy * 6:30 PM
 Oct. 5 South Alabama * 1 PM
 Oct. 10 at Arkansas State * 4 PM
 Oct. 12 at UALR * 1 PM
 Oct. 17 Louisiana-Monroe * 6:30 PM
 Oct. 19 Louisiana-Lafayette * 1 PM
 Oct. 24 at North Texas * 7 PM
 Oct. 26 at Denver * 12 PM
 Oct. 31 at Western Kentucky * 6 PM
 Nov. 5-8 Sun Belt Championships \$ TBA

- Exhibition contest

^ - Middle Tennessee Classic, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

& - Tulsa Tournament, Tulsa, Okla.

* - Sun Belt Conference Match

\$ - Sun Belt Championships, Denton Texas

All times Central

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