

August 12, 2008

## Soccer season fast approaching

Exhibition home match against Austin Peay set for Saturday at 6:30 PM

David Powell

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** - Middle Tennessee soccer is poised for a breakout season as the return of key veterans coupled with one of the largest recruiting classes in program history has the Aston Rhoden-led Blue Raiders full of strong expectations.

The Blue Raiders are coming off a second-place regular-season finish in the Sun Belt Conference during 2007 and despite their disappointing run in last season's conference tournament, the program has emerged as a top contender for the league championship in Rhoden's seven years at the helm.

The successful head coach enters this season as the winningest soccer coach in school history and he believes a blend of talented newcomers combined with the return of experienced letterwinners will create the competition and depth to take the Blue Raiders all the way to the conference title.



Middle Tennessee Soccer adds a talented group of newcomers to a successful core of veteran players for the 2008 season. (MT)

The forward position has been totally revamped and should be one of the most competitive coming into the season. Returnees [Jen Threlkeld](#), Kelly Downs, [Kim Farrant](#), and [Caitlin Reeves](#) will be joined by newcomers [Luisa Moscoso](#), [Shan Jones](#), [Heather McDonnell](#), Ashli Julien, Lynsey Carrier and [Alyssa Palmacci](#) to form a talented group of offensive players.

"Our attack will be more potent than that of last year," Rhoden said. "We now have speed, strength, creativity, and strong mental toughness in all our forwards. They are all capable of scoring several goals per game and will be a very exciting group to watch."

The midfielders will be young but versatile this season. With a group of seasoned veterans and a wealth of new talent, the Blue Raiders will be able to rely on the tremendous depth at the position.

Sophomores [Jaimee Cooper](#), [Vanessa Mueggler](#) and [Sarah Beth Lee](#) return as key members of the midfield, while incoming freshmen [Laura Lamberth](#), [Heather McDonnell](#), and [Hope Suominen](#) will make the midfield position even more competitive and versatile.

Veterans [Nenita Burgess](#) and [Elise Hutter](#) will look to lead a young, but talented back line, along with sophomores [Fran Howells](#), Bethany Bertovic, [Emily Snowdon](#) and [Emily Harris](#). Newcomers [Jenna Bowers](#), [Elisabeth Sikes](#), [Jessica Heckman](#), and [Charity Blair](#) will make this a very competitive group as all are expected to challenge for a starting position.

"We now have depth in our defense. Several of our young players have grown more confident and will now be solid contributors to the team," Rhoden said. "The group had a much better understanding of our defensive schemes after the spring season and will be a fun group to watch over the next few years."

Goalkeeping duties will once again rest on the shoulders of Kela Casiple and [Erynn Murray](#) and has been one of the biggest battles in preseason camp, with the competition most likely continuing into the early part of the season before Rhoden settles on a starter.

"It's great to finally have depth at this position. With two very solid keepers we should see increase competition for playing time," Rhoden said. "The position is wide open and a good showing in preseason by either keeper will earn her early playing time."

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