Blue Raiders set to kickoff Sun Belt Tournament

Match against FAU slated for 1 p.m. on Wednesday

November 4, 2008 · David Powell

DENTON, Texas - Middle Tennessee opens up the 2008 Sun Belt Conference Soccer Tournament with a first-round match against the Florida Atlantic Owls at the Mean Green Soccer Complex at 1 p.m. Wednesday. Middle Tennessee (9-7-3, 7-3-1) clinched the fourth seed in the tournament with a 2-2 draw against rival Western Kentucky last weekend at Blue Raider Field. The Blue Raiders equalized through a Jen Threlkeld header with just nine seconds remaining until the final whistle to force overtime. Florida Atlantic (6-9-2, 5-4-2) is coming off a positive recent run of results, losing just once in their previous seven matches. The fifth-seeded Owls are paced by Ashley Mannarino and Laura Hyvonen. The forward tandem is dangerous in front of goal, combining for 12 of Florida Atlantic's 22 strikes during the regular season. "Florida Atlantic is a very strong team and has gotten some positive results towards the end of the season," Head Coach Aston Rhoden said. "With it being the quarterfinals we expect a tough game and I am confident that we have prepared well." The Blue Raiders picked up a 1-0 shutout in their previous match with the Owls earlier this season in Boca Raton, Fla. Defense will again play a key role and Middle Tennessee showed throughout the regular season this is an area where they are not lacking quality. The backline conceded a school record-low 19 goals in 19 matches, beating out the 2004 squad by three goals. Talented Freshman Shan Jones leads the Blue Raiders on the offensive side of the ball, compiling 11 goals and two assists in 18 starts. Junior Jen Threlkeld, who was named to the All-Sun Belt Conference Preseason team, has been enjoying a good run of late and leads the squad with four goals in her last five matches. "It is great to have a defensive unit that does not allow a lot of

goals and it is important to have a strong attacking unit that can create and score as well," Rhoden said. "Both areas are going to be important throughout this tournament." Live audio for the match is available free of charge on GoBlueRaiders.com. Live video for the entire tournament is available for $9.95 as part of SBC Extra on SunBeltSports.org.

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