

January 28, 2005

Blue Raiders Picked Fifth in Baseball Poll

MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Defending Sun Belt champion Middle Tennessee was picked to finish fifth in 2005 in a vote of the league's baseball coaches released Friday by the conference office.

The Blue Raiders received 43 votes in a panel of the league's nine coaches. Middle Tennessee returns five everyday starters from last year's 40-22 squad, but lost all three weekend starters and seven pitchers overall from the staff.

Louisiana-Lafayette, who has not won a regular season title since 1997 and finished 34-23 in 2004, received eight of the nine first-place votes to take top honors in the poll. Head coach Tony Robichaux returns perhaps the league's top pitcher in righthander Kevin Ardoin (6-2, 3.30 ERA), a 12th-round draft choice of the Texas Rangers in 2004. Ardoin struck out 95 in 106.1 innings of work last season.

The Cajuns also return a pair of All-Sun Belt performers in the infield, first baseman Phillip Hawke (.329, 10 HR, 42 RBIs) and third baseman Dallas Morris, who batted .373 last year before going down with a leg injury.

"Louisiana-Lafayette has a lot of returning players with a good pitching staff coming back, and I can easily see them as the top pick," Middle Tennessee head coach Steve Peterson said. The league has a chance to be very strong with some very good pitchers. There will be strong baseball at the top of the league.

"[The coaches] have us about where they always pick us, in the middle of the pack," he said. " We have some position players coming back, and if we had quality starting pitching coming back, we would probably be higher. The position players have to step up for us and our pitching needs to be solid."

South Alabama was second in the poll, with the Jaguars returning 2004 Freshman All-American P.J. Walters on the mound. Walters went 10-1 with a 2.43 ERA last season, striking out 119 with only 38 walks and six complete games.

Defending Sun Belt Tournament champion Western Kentucky was predicted to finish third. The Hilltoppers return lefthander Grady Hinchman, the 2004 Sun Belt Tournament Most Outstanding Player. Hinchman was 7-5 with a 3.00 ERA in 2004 and threw a complete-game gem in a 1-0 shutout at Ole Miss in the NCAA Regionals.

Florida International was picked ahead of Middle Tennessee in fourth. Panthers head coach Danny Price is looking for his 1,000th win as skipper at FIU. The Panthers return centerfielder Dennis Diaz, who led the league with 49 stolen bases last year, along with infielder Luis Rivera.

The other first-place vote in the league went to New Mexico State, which placed sixth in the voting. Arkansas State was seventh, followed by New Orleans and Arkansas-Little Rock.

Sun Belt baseball action begins this weekend with Florida International playing Florida A&M. Middle Tennessee begins its season February 18-20, with the three-game series against Ball State at Reese Smith Field.

SUN BELT CONFERENCE PRESEASON BASEBALL POLL


As voted on by the league's 9 head coaches

** First-place votes in parentheses

Team Pts.

1. Louisiana-Lafayette (8) 80
2. South Alabama 65
3. Western Kentucky 57
4. Florida International 54
5. Middle Tennessee 43
6. New Mexico State (1) 38
7. Arkansas State 25
8. New Orleans 22
9. Arkansas-Little Rock 21



Senior Eric McNamee and the Blue Raiders were picked to finish fifth in a preseason poll of the Sun Belt's coaches released Friday. (MT) 

Printed on February 10, 2012

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/3635>