Blue Raiders open season at ECU Invitational

Face off against Virginia and East Carolina

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn.- Middle Tennessee softball travels to Greenville, N.C. to open the 2009 season at the East Carolina Invitational against the Virginia Cavaliers and host Pirates on Saturday. The Blue Raiders are looking to have a successful showing against the two highly-touted programs and gain momentum going into a non-conference slate that features such teams as Auburn and Florida State. Middle Tennessee starts things off against the ACC-foe Cavaliers with first pitch scheduled for 10 a.m. CT at ECU Softball Field. UVA returns seven starters and 12 letter-winners to a team that posted a 15-39 record overall and finished eighth in the Atlantic Coast Conference lat season with a 6-15 mark. UVA are led by second-year Head Coach Eileen Schmidt who owns a 15-39 record in charge of the Cavaliers and has posted 138-202 mark in her career. The talented coach is in the middle of retooling a program that has traditionally enjoyed success on both conference and national levels. "I think it is in our favor that we open up with Virginia first," Nevar said. "They have a lot of new players on their roster and are in a rebuilding phase in their program right now. They are a well-coaches team and I expect this game to be very competitive." The Blue Raiders and Virginia are meeting for the seventh time in school history. They last met on February 18, 2007 when the Blue Raiders rolled on run rule to a 11-2 victory over the Cavaliers in five innings. Later on Saturday, Middle Tennessee faces off on the diamond against the host Pirates at 2 p.m. CT. East Carolina returns eight starters and 13 letter-winners to a team that went 37-30 overall and placed fifth in Conference USA last season. Despite not finishing high in their conference standings, several quality non-conference victories propelled them into the NCAA Tournament in the form of an at-large bid. They rolled to their first-ever win

national tournament game before bowing out 3-2 to the Sun Belt and eventual College World Series participant Louisiana-Lafayette Ragin' Cajuns. "It is our first time going to East Carolina. They ended last year on a huge roll and got a NCAA Regional at-large bid," Nevar said. "You can not ask for anything better than to be squaring off in two games against a team of that caliber. They have a packed lineup and we are going to find out real quick what areas we need to improve in our game. It is a good test for our players." ECU is led by Tracey Kee who owns an impressive 534-279-1 record at the school through 13 seasons. Blue Raider Head Coach Sue Nevar holds a 2-3 career record against the Pirates. Middle Tennessee squares off against both teams again on Sunday. Game times are at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. CT respectively. "We need to play with the confidence that we are going to win three or four games out of four this weekend," Nevar said. "Our goal in these four games is to develop the continuity and momentum that will carry over to the next two tournaments and into Sun Belt Conference play.

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