Blue Raiders debut new stadium Friday

2009 season opens with first pitch at 3 p.m.

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee has high hopes for the 2009 season, beginning with the official opening of its newly renovated stadium, Reese Smith Jr. Field on Friday, Feb. 19. The Blue Raiders, who posted a 27-29-1 overall record in 2008 setting a number of offensive season records, are returning eight positional starters and nine pitchers. "I've been involved with opening day since I was eight years old and in Little League baseball. I am very excited and this is the only team that will open the new Reese Smith Jr. Field. This is a special moment for my team, my coaching staff and me. It will also be a special moment for everyone that is here because it will never happen again," head coach Steve Peterson said. Middle Tennessee has seven seniors on this year's team, who along with 12 juniors will add depth and leadership on the field. The Blue Raiders have just seven newcomers with two transfers and four true freshmen on the 2009 squad. This season the pitching staff is a year older with more depth after beginning the 2008 season untested. The Blue Raiders lost just two non-senior pitchers from last year's squad. Sophomore Bryce Brentz being healthy to pitch will be a key component in the Blue Raider arsenal. "Our rotation will be Bryce Brentz on Friday, Kenny Roberts on Saturday and Francescon on Sunday," Peterson said. "On the mound we have to force the opposition to hit our pitches. Throw strikes and don't be afraid of our pitch which is not is right down the middle of the plate. If we do these things we will be a good ball club." Sophomore PJ Francescon performed well in the fall and will add further depth to the pitching staff in 2009. Sophomore Jud Stoltz, who saw a little action in 2008, had success in summer ball and in the fall putting him in position to compete for one of the starting roles. Junior Tyler Hyde is another Middle Tennessee pitcher who had success in the summer and is in position to be one of the top pitchers on the staff. The Blue Raiders also add junior Coty Woods and sophomore Nick Montgomery to the roster this season. Woods, a transfer from Walters State, is an established pitcher out of the bullpen and will help the Blue Raiders in the closer role as well as in relief. Montgomery will be used in a lot of different ways and has the potential to throw a lot of innings this season. The Blue Raiders lost just one offensive power from 2008- in Zach Barrett to graduation- but return senior Rawley Bishop and Brentz. Bishop has helped guide the Middle Tennessee offense the

last three years and will continue to do so as a senior. He and Brentz tied for fifth for home runs in a single-season in 2008 and their bats will lead an offense that has a lot of power returning. "What we have to improve on is we have to play routine baseball and make routine plays. We need to be able to physically and mentally move runner. When the time comes we need to not have an ego and either get a hit or bunt to advance the runner," Peterson said. Brentz along with senior Nathan Hines was named to the Preseason All-Sun Belt team by the league office. The pair along with Bishop will help lead the offense. Junior Zach Hudson was third on the team in batting average in 2008 and after a great summer and fall has worked his way into the mix in the outfield. Junior Drew Robertson is starting to come around offensively as he performed well in the fall. Sophomore Justin Miller also performed well at the plate in the fall and will see more playing time this season. After playing a significant number of away games and moving home games due to construction at the stadium in 2008, the Blue Raiders will play more home games this season. Middle Tennessee begins 2009 by playing nine of its first 10 games at Reese Smith Field. The Blue Raiders open with perennial Missouri Valley power Missouri State before rounding out the home stand with in-state foe Memphis. Friday's game begins at 3 p.m. at Reese Smith Jr. Field and will be the first game in the new stadium. All who attend Friday's game will receive a commemorative certificate and card with the history of the stadium. "The administration is doing keepsakes where you can remember the day. You have to realize Friday will never happen again, the opening day of the new stadium which people have been contributing to and I have been running my mouth about for the last 10 years. It is finally happening. Please come out and watch the game, if not all of it at least part of it. Come be a part of the history and first pitch of this season," Peterson said. Middle Tennessee will round out the weekend series on Saturday, Feb. 21 at 2 p.m. and Sunday, Feb. 22 at 1 p.m. The Blue Raiders are 6-23 all-time against Missouri State and were swept in the series at Springfield, Mo., in 2008. Head coach Steve Peterson is entering his 22nd season at the helm of the Blue Raiders and has posted an impressive 663-531-3 record during that time. The Blue Raiders may be heard on 88.3 FM in Murfreesboro as well as on the internet Friday and Sunday and will only be on the internet Saturday. Live stats will be available on goblueraiders.com for each game. **45 Degree Guarantee:** If the temperature is below 45º at the first pitch you may exchange your tickets to the ticket office within three business days for a Sun Belt conference game of your choice. * *Tickets may not be exchanged for the Tennessee or Vanderbilt games.* **Season Tickets:** 2009 season tickets are still on sale through the ticket office at Floyd Stadium. Ticket prices are as follows: Season Family Bleacher Pass $60; Season Single Bleacher Pass $45. For questions about chairback seating at Reese Smith Field contact the BRAA at (615) 898-2210.

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