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Men's golf ties No. 5 Stanford, tops No. 7 Alabama at Callaway Collegiate Match Play

Blue Raiders qualify for championship bracket, face San Diego State Monday

Athletic Communications

RANCHO SANTA FE, Calif. - There is something about competing against the nation's best that seems to bring out the best in Middle Tennessee's golf team.

The Blue Raiders shot 25-over 601 during the two rounds of medal play qualifying and finished tied for seventh to grab one of the coveted top eight spots at the Callaway Collegiate Match Play Championship at The Farms Golf Club in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., Sunday.

The 16-team field includes four teams ranked among the Top 10 in the Golfstat rankings, as well as 14 teams ranked in the Top 50. Middle Tennessee was one of the two unranked teams amongst the field entering the tournament. Its performance Sunday suggests the Blue Raiders won't remain unranked after tying No. 5 Stanford and finishing ahead of No. 7 Alabama, as well as five other teams ranked in the Top 50.

As a bonus, the Blue Raiders also qualified for the championship bracket of the Match Play Championship. Middle Tennessee tied No. 5 Stanford and No. 33 Arizona State but won the drop score tie-breaker procedure against both teams to earn the No. 7 seed. Middle Tennessee will play No. 2 seed San Diego State in match play competition Monday morning. A second round of match play will follow Monday afternoon, setting up Tuesday's championship round.

The top eight finishing teams from medal play Sunday advanced to the championship bracket while teams nine through 16 compete in a consolation bracket. The Callaway Match Play Championship follows the same format that has been adopted for the 2009 NCAA Division I National Championship.

Middle Tennessee earned an invitation to play in the Callaway Collegiate Match Play Championship based on its Top 15 finish at the 2008 NCAA National Championships. The Blue Raiders made the most of their opportunity Sunday as only the stroke play portion of the national event counts toward the Golfstat Rankings that weigh heavily in the NCAA selection process.

The Blue Raiders entered Callaway Collegiate Match Play ranked No. 73 in Golfstat and they figured their standing could vault with a strong showing.

"We knew coming in that if put our best foot forward in stroke play that could go a long way toward helping us gain an at-large (berth into a NCAA Regional) should we not when the Sun Belt Championships," Middle Tennessee Head Golf Coach Whit Turnbow said. "We took a step in the right direction today, for sure. This was the day for us. We wanted to come here and pick up some huge wins when it comes to the rankings, and we did. To come in here and represent Middle Tennessee and the Sun Belt against some of the best teams in the country the way we did today, it was nice to see."

But now to the business of working through the match play portion of the tournament.



Craig Smith chips onto the green on the No. 9 hole at The Farms Golf Club Sunday. (MT)

"We played pretty good (Sunday) but we did not play our best," Turnbow said. "I know our best round is still in them. (Sunday) was the big day for us so now I hope they will let go, have fun and get after it. The conditions were not great (Sunday). It was cold, windy and it rained for more than an hour during the first round. Our guys are pretty tough and we just hung around and made the best of the situation."

Indiana finished first in the medal round on the strength of a 6-under second round and will carry the top seed into match play. San Diego State and Florida State tied for second but San Diego State won the tie-breaker procedure for the No. 2 seed. Florida State is the No. 3 seed, followed by Texas A&M, UCLA, Texas Tech, Middle Tennessee and Stanford.

Seniors **Rick Cochran** and **Chas Narramore** are among the Top 20 individuals. They tied for 17th with a 4-over 148. **Jason Millard** tied for 43rd with a 9-over 153, followed by **Craig Smith** (T49, 10-over 154) and **Kent Bulle** (T59, 12-over 156).

Cochran and Narramore played the course even during their strong first round efforts and they posted identical 4-over 76 scores in the second round. Smith's eagle on the par-5 No. 9 highlighted his first round performance.

Bulle opened with a disappointing 81 and his score did not count toward the team standing in the first round, but he responded with a 75 in the second round to bounce back and help the team when it mattered most. Smith's 5-over 77 was not counted in the second round; however, as it turned out each of their scores would weigh heavily in the end.

Only the top four (of five) scores count in collegiate team golf but the tie-breaking procedure at the Calloway Match Play takes the score that was not counted in each round and compares that total between the teams to determine the winner. In both case, Middle Tennessee won the tie-breaker over Stanford and Arizona State.

So Bulle's birdie and consecutive pars to close the first round may not have seemed big at the time but salvaging a tough round with a positive ending proved gigantic for Middle Tennessee. The same can be said for Smith, whose score was discarded from the team consideration despite playing the final seven holes at even par. It was strong enough to help the Blue Raiders punch a ticket into the championship bracket.

"Our guys knew what was going on and I told them it was going to be nip and tuck with about six holes to go," Turnbow said. "The tie-breaker procedure comes down to the fifth man's score and that's something we talk about all the time. You never know when you are going to need that score. We needed it today and they were there. That was huge."

The match play portion of the event begins with an 8 a.m. shotgun start Monday.

Calloway Collegiate Match Play Championship

Farms Golf Club, Par-72

First Round Qualifying Team Scores

() - denotes national Golfstat ranking

- 1 Indiana (6) 303-282 585 +9
- T2 San Diego State (30) 293-295 588 * +12
- T2 Florida State (22) 295-293 588 +12
- 4 Texas A&M (27) 290-300 590 +14
- 5 UCLA (26) 309-284 593 +17
- 6 Texas Tech (10) 301-298 599 +23
- T7 Middle Tennessee 298-303 601 +25 ****
- T7 Stanford (5) 297-304 601 +25 ***
- T7 Arizona State (33) 288-313 601 +25
- 10 San Diego 292-311 603 +27

- 11 Chattanooga (28) 299-305 604 +28
- 12 Alabama (7) 303-302 605 +29
- 13 Charlotte (42) 308-300 608 +32
- 14 Louisville (41) 308-301 609 +33
- 15 UC-Irvine (47) 308-303 611 +35
- 16 Duke (39) 304-311 615 +39

*San Diego State beat Florida State in tie-breaker procedure for No. 2 seed

**Middle Tennessee beat Stanford, Arizona State in tie-breaker procedure for No. 7 seed

*** Stanford beat Arizona State in tie-breaker procedure for No. 8 seed

T7 MT Team Scores (601)

T17 **Chas Narramore** 72-76 148 +4

T17 **Rick Cochran** 72-76 148 +4

T43 **Jason Millard** 77-76 153 +9

T49 **Craig Smith** 77-77 154 +10

T59 **Kent Bulle** 81-75 156 +12

Championship Bracket

1 Indiana vs. 8 Stanford

4 Texas A&M vs. 5 UCLA

3 Florida State vs. 6 Texas Tech

2 San Diego State vs. 7 Middle Tennessee

Consolation Bracket

9 Arizona State vs. 16 Duke

12 Alabama vs. 13 Charlotte

11 Chattanooga vs. 14 Louisville

10 San Diego vs. 15 UC Irvine

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