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Golf teams begin quest for SBC Championships Conference tournaments begin Monday in Houston

Athletic Communications

HOUSTON, Texas - Both Middle Tennessee golf teams will begin their quests for a first Sun Belt Conference championship when the SBC Men's and Women's Golf Championships tee off at Cypresswood Golf Club in Houston.



Middle Tennessee women's golf coach Chris Adams, left, and men's golf coach Whit Turnbow are excited about the team's chances at the SBC Championships this week. (MT)

The event will include three 18-hole rounds beginning Monday and running through Wednesday with the league's automatic NCAA berth on the line for the men's and women's championships. The men will play the 7,220-yard Tradition Course and the women will play the 6,168 Cypress Course.

The men's team has enjoyed a strong spring season and have gained momentum down the stretch, including a championship at the Callaway Collegiate Match Play Championship three weeks ago when the Blue Raiders knocked off No. 6-ranked Indiana for the title.

Middle Tennessee is ranked 67th nationally in the Golfstat rankings, while defending champion Denver is 55th. The Blue Raiders earned an at-large berth in the NCAA Regionals last season before making their run to the NCAA National Championships; however, the only guarantee to reach the postseason is to win the championship.

Second-year Head Coach Whit Turnbow believes his team has the ability to do that.

"The Sun Belt Conference is very strong and we have several strong teams," Turnbow said. "We believe we are one of those teams. I think the league is as deep as it has been over the last several years and we are going to have to play very well to win the championship but we also have a roster full of guys who have been in this position and know what to do."

Turnbow also has a lineup filled with competitors who have the advantage of having played the Tradition Course in the past, including four players who finished second, one-shot back, in The All-American there earlier this season.

"We have had success there before but all that really matters is what we do this week," Turnbow said. "Our guys have a lot of confidence but they have confidence because they are playing well and they know what they have to get done, not because they have played this course previously."

Turnbow will send a veteran lineup of **Kent Bulle**, **Rick Cochran**, **Jason Millard**, **Chas Narramore** and **Craig Smith** into the tournament. Four of the five players will be making at least their third SBC Championship appearance.

Middle Tennessee second-year women's coach Chris Adams also is excited about the prospects of her team, albeit one of the youngest in the field. Middle Tennessee's women have continued to progress throughout the spring and senior Leigh Wilkins has consistently played the best golf of her Blue Raider career during her final campaign.

Additionally, senior Mallory Bishop is coming off one of her best showings of the spring and Adams hopes their experience will help carry the team during the three-day event. The Blue Raiders' lineup will include Wilkins, Bishop, Clara Leathers, Morgan Hale and Karisa Akin.

"We have made progress throughout the season and our younger players have improved

throughout but we really need our veterans to continue doing what they have," Adams said. "It will be a competitive field and there are several quality teams in the conference but I believe we can stay in the hunt."

Denver is the defending champion on the men's and women's side.

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