Women's golf equals highest finish ever at SBC Championships

Blue Raiders shoot best round on final day to secure third

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HOUSTON - Middle Tennessee saved its best for last with a 6-over 294 in the final round to climb to third place and equal its best finish ever in the SBC Women's Golf Championships at the Cypresswood Golf Club Wednesday.

- **Photos:** Final Round Gallery

The Blue Raiders continued to receive quality contribution throughout the lineup to make a move on the leaderboard and hold off higher-rated teams on the event's final day. Middle Tennessee also finished third at the SBC Championships in 2004 and 2006. No. 19-ranked Denver successfully defended its title, winning the championship by 14 shots over second-place UALR. The Pioneers shot 5-under 859 for the three-day event. "I'm very proud of the team and the way they kept their composure and battled throughout this tournament," said Middle Tennessee second-year coach Chris Adams, whose team finished fourth at the event in her debut season. "We were able to get off to a good start and we maintained that throughout the three days. We had some bumps along the way but we did a good job of overcoming those. It was a good showing and good run for our team. There are many positives."

Among the positives is the fact three players in Middle Tennessee's lineup will return in 2009-10 as Adams fielded a younger team this season; however, the veterans in the group represented the team well and helped lead the charge at the SBC Championships. Senior Leigh Wilkins tied for ninth with a 6-over 222 and fellow senior Mallory Bishop also finished her career strong by tying for 18th with a 12-over 228. Morgan Hale also tied for 18th. Clara Leathers (17-over, 233) tied for 32nd and freshman Karisa Akin (21-over, 237) tied for 41st in her first conference championship. Wilkins capped her best season as a Blue Raider in memorable fashion. The Murfreesboro, Tenn., native was 3-under 69 in the final round but it was her play on the back nine that was stupendous. She played the back at 4-under and closed with a birdie on 17 and followed with an eagle on the par-4 No. 18 when she knocked it in from 130 yards out for her last college shot. Her final nine holes featured two birdies, an eagle and six pars. "I am glad I was able to finish the way I did and help the team have a good, solid finish at the (SBC Championships)," Wilkins said. "I've had a great career at Middle Tennessee and developed a lot of great memories. I'm proud to have been part of this team because I think we made progress this year and we showed that at the end with our highest finish ever at the conference tournament." Bishop also came through in the clutch with a strong showing at the SBC Championships. The Knoxville, Tenn., native played the front even to help the Blue Raiders enjoy a strong, confident start. She was 3-over in the final round and turned in a Top 20 finish. Hale also was splendid as Middle Tennessee had to hold off FIU and Florida Atlantic - each higher-rated teams - for third place. Hale was 1-over in the final round and collected four birdies. **SBC Women's Golf Championships**

Houston, Texas

Cypresswood Golf Club - Cypress Course, Par-72

Final Team Results

1 Denver 293-284-282 859 -5
2 UALR 305-288-280 873 +9
3 Middle Tennessee 304-309-294 907 +43
T4 Florida Atlantic 309-302-298 909 +45
T4 FIU 314-303-292 909 +45
6 Troy 312-302-300 914 +50
7 North Texas 318-302-295 915 +51
8 Arkansas State 313-314-304 931 +67
9 ULM 319-311-305 935 +71
10 South Alabama 317-306-313 936 +72
11 WKU 319-318-315 952 +88

3 MT Scores (907)

T9 Leigh Wilkins 75-78-69 222 +6
T18 Morgan Hale 77-78-73 228 +12
T18 Mallory Bishop 72-81-75 228 +12
T32 Clara Leathers 80-76-77 233 +17
T41 Karisa Akin 80-77-80 237 +21

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