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Olde Stone will provide stiff test for top collegiate golfers

Blue Raiders begin NCAA Regional action Thursday

Athletic Communications

ALVATON, Ky. - Remember the old saying, "Be careful what you ask for?"

Outwardly Middle Tennessee golfers will tell you they would have been happy with any of the potential six NCAA Regional sites as long as they were in one. Within the camp, players made it clear they hoped for the opportunity to play in the Central Regional at The Club at Olde Stone in Alvaton, Ky., located on the outskirts of Bowling Green.

They got their wish when the NCAA Men's Golf Selection Committee placed Middle Tennessee in the Central Regional where they will begin play, along with 13 other teams, Thursday. The Blue Raiders' first tee time is 9:40 a.m., when **Craig Smith** hits the links. He will be followed by **Jason Millard** (9:50), **Kent Bulle** (10:00), **Rick Cochran** (10:10) and **Chas Narramore** (10:20). Middle Tennessee is paired with Vanderbilt and Austin Peay for the first round. The event is free and open to the public.

"There are several reasons we had hoped to play Olde Stone but one of the biggest was the proximity," Middle Tennessee second-year Head Coach Whit Turnbow said. "There are not many opportunities for our fans or golf enthusiasts, in general, to watch our team but with Olde Stone being (80 miles) from Murfreesboro it gives people a chance to come out and watch some really high-level golf and I hope they will take advantage. Our parents all will be able to follow their son and the team in a national postseason event because of the location. There are a lot of positives and we are playing a great course."

Participants on the 14 teams, plus the five individuals selected, also will face a challenging trek sure to test the players' physical and mental approach throughout the weekend. The top five teams and top individual not on an advancing team will move on to the NCAA Division I Men's Golf Championships at the Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio May 27-30.


Teams were provided the opportunity to play the course during Wednesday's practice round and any thoughts some may had of enjoying a stellar weekend on the scoreboard were quickly tamed.

"Bogeys are a good score on this course," junior **Kent Bulle** said. "It's long and it's difficult so you have to stay focused and you have to let things go. You have to understand that at this point in the season one shot can make all the difference. It's going to test all of us."

Bulle should know better than most any player in the field. He is from nearby Glasgow, Ky., a mere 40 miles from The Club at Olde Stone. He plays the course with regularity during summer and has an understanding of where the danger awaits and where success can be enjoyed.

"I've been able to talk to the guys about the course and different things about it," Bulle said. "They all have played it in the past so it's not new to us. It's still difficult and as you can tell (during the practice round) it's playing even harder for this tournament. The key is hitting it in the fairway. The rough is thick and the greens are hard and fast. You have to manage your game and know where to put it on the green."



Kent Bulle watches his shot during Wednesday's practice round at Olde Stone. Bulle is hoping his knowledge of the tough course will be an asset during the NCAA Central Regional. (B. Lambert) 

Olde Stone was designed by internationally acclaimed architect Arthur Hills and was voted the No. 8 Best New Private Course in America by Golf Digest in 2007. Created with a deep respect for the land, Hills created a masterpiece on terrain he describes as "one of the absolute best sites we've worked on." Bentgrass fairways and greens are dotted with dazzling white sand bunkers. Trees, not houses, line the fairways of this core course and the strategically placed tee boxes insure a challenging game.

"It's going to be a test but it's a fair test," Turnbow said. "This is the way it is supposed to be when you reach this level. If you are one of the five teams that advance you certainly have earned it. We are excited about the opportunity and we will be very disappointed if we aren't one of the top five teams advancing Saturday."

The Blue Raiders are in the NCAA Golf Regionals for the second time in as many years and the third time in program history. They advanced out of the East Regional in 2008 and reached the NCAA Division I Men's Golf Championship for the first time in program history, and subsequently made the cut.

Four members of last year's team - Bulle, Cochran, Millard and Narramore - are back in the lineup. **Craig Smith** returned to the lineup this season after a back injury cost him the opportunity to participate in 2008.

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