Another memorable comeback falls short in Central Regional

Golfers among best in final two rounds, first round too much to overcome

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ALVATON, Ky. - Another patented Middle Tennessee comeback was in the works during the final round of the NCAA Division I Men's Central Regional at The Club at Olde Stone Saturday but a sizeable first-round deficit proved too much to overcome as the Blue Raiders finished ninth in the 14-team field. Middle Tennessee had stormed back from numerous first-round deficits throughout the season, including 12 shots to eventually win the SBC Championship, and it was putting together another believable run after falling 22 shots off the cut line following a 310 in the first round. The Blue Raiders overcame two delays and suspended play before shooting a 1-under 287 in the second round - the second-best effort of the morning. The Blue Raiders had closed to within four shots of the cut early in the final round and finished well at 1-over 289, once again turning in the second-best round of the day, but the comeback bid fell five shots short of advancing. Junior Craig Smith made the most of his first postseason appearance, finishing 15th with a 3-over 219, followed by Jason Millard (T20, 5-over 221), Kent Bulle (T31, 6-over 222), Chas Narramore (8-over 224), and Rick Cochran (T56, 14-over 230). Middle Tennessee was one of three teams with four players in the top 30. UCLA won the Central Regional with a 1-under 863 and was the only team under par for the tournament. The other four teams to advance into the NCAA National Championships were Washington (870), Georgia

Tech (880), Ohio State (880) and Duke (881). Louisville, Mississippi and N.C. State tied for sixth at 21-over 885, followed by Middle Tennessee one shot back in ninth at 886. "I couldn't be more proud of the effort these guys gave," Middle Tennessee Head Coach Whit Turnbow said. "They put together a good run and gave it everything they had. We just had too much of a deficit to overcome but they almost did it and I would not have been surprised if they did." Middle Tennessee was the hottest team in the field for the final 45 holes of the 54-hole event but the first nine holes proved decisive. The Blue Raiders were 18-over after their first nine holes of the first round. They played the remainder of tournament at 4-over. "It's disappointing to realize that stretch is what got us but we battled and we just fell short," Narramore said. "I'm proud of the way our team played the last two days. We gave it a good run and if we were not going to advance we were definitely going to make sure some teams were going to have to play better than us to hold us off and they did. We still have a lot we can be proud of as far as what we have accomplished." Middle Tennessee won the program's first SBC Championship, as well as the prestigious Callaway Collegiate Match Play Championship, and reached a NCAA Regional in consecutive seasons for the first time in program history. The Blue Raiders' program also reached national acclaim in the previous two seasons and Cochran and Narramore were cornerstones in the building process. Narramore became the only Blue Raider to play in three NCAA Regionals in 2009. Saturday they played their final collegiate round. "Those two, along with Craig Smith, were in the same class and they have a great deal to do with what we have accomplished the last few years," Turnbow said. "They have been the foundation and they have helped set a high standard of which others after them will strive to reach. I'm not sure they will realize just how much they have accomplished and meant to this program until they have time to reflect." The future also is bright. Middle Tennessee's top three scorers in the Central Regional are all returning players as Bulle and Smith will be seniors and Millard is a rising junior. Smith missed the 2008 postseason with a back injury but he made a great deal of noise in the 2009 event. He fell three shots shy of advancing to the NCAA National Championships as an individual and finished 15th with a 3-over 219. Smith was 2-under in the second and third rounds and tied for fifth among the field with 11 birdies. Millard turned in two rounds of even par and tied for 20th. He turned in 33 pars and nine birdies during the three rounds. Bulle was 1-under over the final two rounds when he collected six of his seven birdies. He was tied for 14th with 35 pars. **NCAA Division I Men's Central Regional**

The Club at Olde Stone, Par-72

Alvaton, Ky.

Final Team Scores

1 UCLA 292-285-286 863 = 863 -1
2 Washington 282-288-300 = 870 +6
T3 Georgia Tech 292-293-295 = 880 +16
T3 Ohio State 300-289-291 = 880 +16
5 Duke 298-292-291 = 881 +17
T6 Louisville 296-293-296 = 885 +21
T6 Mississippi 296-299-290 = 885 +21
T6 NC State 294-295-296 = 885 +21
9 Middle Tennessee 310-287-289 = 886 +22
10 Vanderbilt 305-294-290 = 889 +25
11 East Tennessee State 299-301-297 = 897 +33
12 Cleveland State 308-305-307 = 920 +56
13 Austin Peay 315-320-313 = 948 +84
14 Bucknell 317-319-316 = 952 +88

9 MT Scores (886)

15 Craig Smith 77-70-72 = 219 +3
T20 Jason Millard 77-72-72 = 221 +5
T31 Kent Bulle 79-70-73 = 222 +6
T44 Chas Narramore 77-75-72 = 224 +8
T56 Rick Cochran 79-77-74 = 230 +14

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