Blue Raiders optimistic heading into offseason

Return all but one starter in 2010

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Things are looking up for Middle Tennessee softball. Although the Blue Raiders concluded an injury-filled season in early May, the team has ever reason to be confident as they begin early preparations for the 2010 campaign. "It was a great year as far as gaining experience," head coach Sue Nevar said. "All of our new players gained an invaluable amount of it this season despite our record. They better understand the game, the expectations, the caliber of competition and what it takes to win." Middle Tennessee began the season with one of the youngest teams in program history, returning just three starters from a squad that went 22-31 in 2008. The Blue Raiders were looking for players to step up, especially the lone senior on the squad, Martha Davis. "The question was going to be, 'When would they all come together and get on the same page?'" Nevar said. "I think Martha shouldered this team the entire year. In the end she was rewarded with a conference honor and that is fabulous. She had a great season." The Signal Mountain, Tenn., native did not disappoint, growing into a leader both on and off the field before being named to the Sun Belt Conference Second Team at the end of the season. Davis led Middle Tennessee in batting average (.296), hits (45), homeruns (6), RBIs (30) and slugging percentage (.467). The honor marked the second time in her storied career that she has picked up a season award by the conference, but the first as a third baseman. She was also named to the second team as well as the Sun Belt All-Tournament Team as an outfielder in 2007. Davis concluded her Middle Tennessee career as one of the most successful players in program history. The third baseman ranked first in RBIs, second in homeruns, third in walks, fourth in extra-base hits, and occupied top ten spots in seven other categories in her storied four years. The squad began the season with seven straight defeats before

rebounding with four wins in a row, including an impressive 11-4 victory over No. 23 Purdue at the War Eagle Classic in Auburn, Ala. on Feb. 21. It was at this crucial point in the season that injuries began to take their toll on the young team. "I think a pivotal point in the season was losing Corrie Abel," Nevar said "We had a head of steam going after the first two tournaments of the year and the future was looking very bright. When she went down we never recovered." Although the team posted their lowest win total on the season since 2005, 17 of its 34 defeats came by three runs or less, including eight one-run losses. One of those single-run defeats came at the hands of No. 6 Tennessee on March 18. "If we win that ball game then I believe things would have gone much different the rest of the season," Nevar said. "It is incredibly demoralizing when you are up on the No. 6 team in the nation with two outs in the final inning and you can't close the door. Junior pitcher Lindsey Vander Lugt was stellar in her junior campaign, working over 198 innings for the third consecutive year and leading the team in every major pitching category. The lefty heads into her final season closing in on several of the program's career marks. The Tumwater HS product trails former softball great Jennifer Martinez by three for the most career appearances, ranks second place all-time for career complete games with 83 and third in school history for strikeouts with 413. Middle Tennessee has consistently been one of the most successful programs off the field and this season was no different. The Blue Raiders were honored for the second-straight year by the Sun Belt for achieving the highest team grade-point average of any school in the conference. The team has now received the award in four of the last five seasons, having previously been honored in 2005, 2006 and 2008. "Even though we were struggling on the field, they still had the intensity to keep it up in the classroom," Nevar said. "They could have settled for just a 3.0 GPA, but they didn't. That speaks volumes about the character of these players. They are winners." With a wealth of experience playing against top competition and riding high on the chemistry that became evident towards the end of the season, things are definitely looking up for Middle Tennessee softball. "We are only in the middle of May and I am excited about getting back on the field this fall," said Nevar, "This one year is going to make a huge difference. We are going to take off next season."

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