

April 16, 2005

Confidence High As Middle Tennessee Golf Teams Prepare For SBC Tourney

MT Media Relations

PORT ST. LUCIE, Fla. - Confidence is not something the Middle Tennessee men's and women's golf teams are short on as they set to begin their quest for the school's first Sun Belt Conference Championships on the links here Monday morning.

In fact, men's Head Coach Johnny Moore and Lady Raider Head Coach Rachael Short believe their respective teams have what it takes to win what they perceive as a wide-open field at the PGA Village Golf Course.

"I think it's a wide-open tournament," Moore said. "It's not a tight course, we are told, it's a wide-open course, which would favor us because we can hit (the ball) hard, go find it and hit it again. We are pretty smart coming into the greens most of the time. We don't take unusual chances so that should favor us. It's the kind of course we should play better than a short, tight course where we are playing a lot of wedges."

Although just in its fourth year of existence, Middle Tennessee's women's golf team has made tremendous strides under Short, whose team has finished fourth or higher in five tournaments this spring. The Lady Raiders won the first tournament in school history when they tamed the field at the USA Lady Jaguar Invitational in early March. The Lady Raiders also finished second at the Lady Moc Classic and have a pair of third-place finishes to their credit.

"As far as our season has gone, every time we have teed it up we have had a chance to win so it's no different. We definitely have a chance to go out and win the Sun Belt Conference," Short said. "Our players play aggressively. I think every time they tee it up they each know they have a chance to win, and I think that makes a big difference as far as how you look at each tournament. Our players have confidence and that definitely helps."

Not only is Moore confident his Blue Raiders have what it takes to shock the field, but they are entering the tournament playing some of their best golf of the spring after an inconsistent fall season.

"I think we all feel better about going into this tournament," senior [Blake Bivens](#) said. "It's been a rocky road this year but it seems like things are getting better and we are coming around as far as hitting the ball, as well as chipping and putting. Experience is the best teacher and we have experience on our team coming into the conference tournament."

Middle Tennessee sends three seniors - Bivens, [Kenny Green](#) and [Josh Nelms](#) - against the field, as well as junior [Josh Nelms](#) and redshirt freshman [Nick Bailes](#). While the Blue Raider roster is loaded with experience its Bailes who has been the squad's most consistent performer this spring. Bailes has the team's best average (74.5) in four spring tournaments.

"I don't feel like I have played as well as I could possibly do, but I do feel like I have helped the team in more than one tournament and that's what matters," Bailes said. "My hope for the week is to help the team as best I can."

Moore likes the mindset of his team entering the tournament, which is a three-day, 54-hole event.


"Nelms has been in three of these, Bivens has been in three of these, Green was here last year so we have at least three who have played in a conference tournament and they know what to expect," Moore said. "Bailes has not been here but he will do well. Experience does mean a lot and we have that going for us."

Lady Raider freshman Taryn Durham leads a young, but talented, Middle Tennessee team. Durham has the second-best stroke average (75.68) of any Sun Belt Conference player and she has a low round of 69 this season.

Durham's presence is a welcome site because she suffered a bout of mononucleosis in recent weeks and her ability to play in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament was a question.

"This time last week we were not sure if I was going to make it or not," Durham said. "I was not feeling good at all but this week has been a lot better. I'm not back to normal, but I'm ready. I was determined that I was coming no matter what. I think we have a good chance here, as good as anyone else. We all are ready to go out and play. We are all aggressive and that has been a strength all season."



Blue Raider golf coach Johnny Moore, left, and Lady Raider coach Rachael Short, watch as their teams hit on the driving range Saturday. Their teams begin play in the SBC Golf Championships Monday morning. (MT) 

Sophomore Maggie McGill (77.2) and senior Kristin Lynch (78.8) also have stroke averages in the 70s, while sophomore Jenny Kim (80.6) and freshman Jamey Dillard (81.2) round out a strong Lady Raider quintet.

While Durham gets a lot of the attention as the team's top player, Short is quick to point out the Lady Raiders' success has been the result of a complete team effort.

"Maggie McGill has had a very good year," Short said. "She has come in this year and has had a great attitude as far as if she has a few bad holes she bounces back and plays well, so she has improved a lot this year as far as maturity on the course. Lynch is a very steady golfer. Dillard has come in and helped us out down the stretch. Kim only played one tournament in the fall but has played every tournament in the spring. She has one of the best golf swings on the team."

Middle Tennessee's teams will play their practice rounds Sunday morning before teeing off the tournament Monday. The Sun Belt Conference championships carry an automatic berth into the NCAA Regionals.

Printed on May 23, 2012

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/3951>