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Blue Raiders set to open 2009 season

Head Coach Matt Peck excited about this season's team and schedule

MT Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - When the 2009 season begins on Friday, the Blue Raider volleyball program will look to continue setting precedents as it has done since head coach Matt Peck took over the program in 2004.

The Blue Raiders advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament for the third consecutive time in 2008 and has high hopes to do the same this fall.

Middle Tennessee returns All-American setter [Leslie Clark](#) along with [Izabela Kozon](#), an All-Sun Belt selection, to help guide this season's squad. The Blue Raiders also welcome back veteran leaders libero [Ashley Waugh](#) and outside hitter [Ashley Mead](#). Middle Tennessee has eight letterwinners returning and adds seven newcomers.

"2009 is shaping up to be one of our best teams here at Middle Tennessee. We now have additional height to compliment our athleticism," Peck said. "The caliber of players we brought in for 2009 is very high and it's probably our best incoming class. "We have some other surprises this year and a different look and I think that will surprise some teams as well."

The Blue Raiders faced a number of obstacles during the 2008 season due to injuries, which included losing middle blocker [Sasha McGlothin](#) to a season-ending injury just two weeks into the campaign. In addition to losing McGlothin, three other players were hurt or played through injuries at one point during the season.

"The team has very high expectations for 2009, especially after our injury-laden year in 2008. Everyone is healthy, and the summer has seen great strides in strength and conditioning for everyone," Peck said.

Middle Tennessee will need to be as healthy as possible during this season as it will play one of its most challenging schedules on record.

"Our 2009 schedule is very tough and we wanted that. The Sun Belt continues to improve overall as a conference and schedules like ours will only help us and other conference schools come NCAA Tournament time. We will be challenged right from the beginning - Kansas, Murray State and Xavier all have previous NCAA experience and all bring strong RPIs into that first weekend."

The Blue Raiders open play on Friday, August 28 with Kansas at 7 p.m. as it plays host to the Middle Tennessee Invitational. In addition to Kansas, Xavier and Murray State will visit Alumni Memorial Gym for the tournament. The following weekend, Middle Tennessee will play host to the Blue Raider Bash. Georgia Tech, Northern Illinois, Northern Iowa and Ohio will compete in the round-robin format tournament.

We are mainly going to focus on getting ready for our nonconference matches. We have a very tough pre-conference schedule, the toughest in the Sun Belt, and I would like to get through that first. We are playing some tough opponents and are going to be challenged early and I think that will help us when we get to the Sun Belt season.

The Blue Raiders will play nine teams from the 2008 NCAA Tournament, including Albany, Florida International, Northern Iowa, Ohio, Rice, Saint Louis, UAB, Washington and Western Kentucky. Middle Tennessee will play three straight matches against teams from the 2008 NCAA Tournament with eight of its 11 matches against those teams in a two week period.

"Our nonconference schedule will go a long way in determining where we end up at the end of the season. I feel having 11 matches against NCAA teams from 2008 will certainly test us. Playing former NCAA Champion Washington is a great opportunity for us to continue our climb as a program. Our single matches against UAB and St. Louis on the road will definitely be an important factor in determining where we will be playing if we indeed make the NCAA Tournament again in 2009."

Middle Tennessee opens its challenging 2009 campaign with Kansas at 7 p.m. on Friday, August 28 at 7 p.m. at Alumni Memorial Gym on the campus of Middle Tennessee. The Blue Raiders will play two matches on Saturday, August 29 beginning at 1 p.m. with Murray State. Then Middle Tennessee will play the final match of the tournament at 7:30 p.m. when it faces off with Xavier. Keep up-to-date on the 2009 Blue Raiders by visiting goblueraiders.com.



Head volleyball coach Matt Peck is looking forward to opening the 2009 season on Friday. ()