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Q & A with head volleyball coach Matt Peck

2009 team from Peck's point of view

MT Athletic Communications

Ranking as high as 15th in the nation, the Blue Raiders wrapped up their 2008 season with a 14-3 SBC record, placed second in the conference and finished 27-8 overall. After advancing to the NCAA tournament for the third consecutive year, the Blue Raiders made it to the second round before falling shy of No. 17 Purdue. With such great success since the arrival of head coach Matt Peck, there are high expectations for the 2009 season.

With the close of fall camp how do you feel about your team as a whole? We are relatively healthy and have had some pretty competitive practices. There are 17 players so we have good numbers with few injuries and few missed practices. We have gotten a lot accomplished but we have a lot to work on still. So I would give us a B+ on what we have done so far.

There are seven newcomers on this season's squad. Does anyone stand out right now as a possible starter? Each has had some brilliant moments and some struggles... [Brandi Waller](#) has been great as a middle and [Halie Vannoy](#) has been doing a great job in the back row so those two may make the soonest contribution for us. [Morgan Peterson](#) has done a great job in the setter position. [Alyssa Wistrick](#) didn't come to us until August while everyone else had been here in July so she is a little bit behind but catching up really well.

[Ashley Adams-Williams](#) has done some really phenomenal things in practice. [Stephanie Daniels](#) and [Jasmine Tipton](#) have done some very nice things also. So I am very pleased with the incoming class. They have worked hard, are in great shape, and are very athletic. Waller and Vannoy may see the most playing time right out of the gate and with the others it will depend where we are in the match.

[Sasha McGlothlin](#) was injured at the beginning of the 2008 season. How will her being back in the line-up help the team this season? Sasha is one of the most positive people I know and is a great teammate. She never blames anyone else when something goes wrong. Right now, she is probably around 70-75% and she feels that she won't be 100% with her brace still on. If we can work Sasha back to being one of our main contributors within a couple of weeks it will be great for our team and will lift them emotionally.

[Ashley Waugh](#) took over the libero role last season and is a veteran defensive player. How will her experience and leadership on defense make the team better? [Ashley Waugh](#) is very emotional player with a positive direction and is equally happy when somebody else gets the job done as when she does. When Waugh is having a great match, our team is going to win 99% of those matches. If we don't win though, it isn't because she had a poor match. Ashley is an exciting player to watch and the girls look to her for leadership on the court.

[Leslie Clark](#) is an All-American setter in addition to being the career assists leader. What does it mean for the team to have some one with those credentials running your offense? Leslie has great leadership qualities in the respect that she leads by example. This training camp has been the most focused, dedicated camp and she has realized she wants to make the most out of her senior year. We have made it to the NCAA tournament the past three years with her and I would be shocked if Leslie didn't lead our team even farther this year.

The Blue Raiders open the season with two home tournaments. How does beginning the season on your home floor against top-tier teams help you prepare for the rest of the year? Our team has traditionally played extremely well in Alumni Memorial Gym. It is a difficult place to play for opponents and is a great volleyball venue. We love to play at home and have great turnouts here with a lot of families coming from across the country. This might be the two strongest weekends we have ever had at our place and I am glad we are playing at home.

Kansas, Xavier, Georgia Tech and Ohio are among the teams participating in your first two tournaments. How will playing teams of this caliber help down the line? Our main focus here is to win the Sun Belt conference. Last year we didn't win but our record was strong enough and our RPI high enough because of our non-conference matches. If we win the conference it isn't left up to anyone else and we will automatically make the NCAA tournament.

[Izabela Kozon](#) is a dual threat as both an outside hitter and defensive specialist. How does her versatility allow flexibility within the line-up? Iza is another very emotional, exciting player with great leadership skills. She gets very excited when something good happens on our side. The more players we have out there who are playing all the way around and looking for every point the better we will be.



Head coach Matt Peck discusses the 2009 squad and season in-depth. ()

Are there any other players on the team who have the same two-way ability? Not right now. Actually, one thing which has helped our program do well is having specialized players. We can focus on certain things in practice with certain people. For example we will have practices for passers only, attackers only, or setters only... We get more accomplished working in smaller groups than having everyone work on every skill.

Coming off three straight post-season appearances is there anything you see in this team that leads you to believe a fourth NCAA appearance is in the future? This is our most athletic team top-to-bottom, most experienced team top-to-bottom, and best team chemistry top-to-bottom so this will be one of our best years. We have had some great success in the Sun Belt, NCAA, and post season in general. Potentially, if things fall into place, this could be our best team.

The Blue Raiders open the 2009 season with back-to-back tournaments hosting Kansas, Murray State, and Xavier at the Middle Tennessee Invitational August 28th and 29th. The following weekend Georgia Tech, Northern Illinois, Northern Iowa, and Ohio will all compete in the Blue Raider Bash on September 4th, 5th, and 6th. All Middle Tennessee matches will be held in Alumni Memorial Gym.

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