Soccer prepares for pair of home matches this weekend

Blue Raiders play host to Oklahoma and Belmont

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee soccer team will return home for a pair of matches this weekend, beginning at 7 p.m. Friday against Big 12 opponent Oklahoma, at Dean A. Hayes Track and Soccer Stadium. The Blue Raiders will also square off against in-state foe Belmont at 1 p.m. Sunday.

"It is definitely a big weekend for us because we are playing two quality opponents," head coach Aston Rhoden said. "It will be good to be back playing at home. This will be our first chance this year to play in front of our total fan base, including our loyal supporters from the community as well as our students and faculty.

"Oklahoma is off to a great start and will come in as a very confident and well coached team. We do expect a very good challenge from them. Belmont has had some positive results against us over the last couple of seasons, which will make it a tough second game of the weekend."

Oklahoma becomes just the second Big 12 school to visit Murfreesboro in the 14-year existence of the Blue Raider program. Last season, Texas Tech came to town as part of the Middle Tennessee

Classic.

The Sooners are off to a 4-0 start with all of their matches being played at home in Norman, Okla. Head coach Nicole Nelson's squad has already eclipsed its win total from a year ago when it posted a 3-15-1 record.

Whitney Palmer paces OU with four goals, including a hat trick in Sunday's triumph over Tulsa. Kelsey Devonshire has stood firm in net, allowing just one score thus far this season for a 0.25 goals-against average.

Middle Tennessee and Oklahoma have met only once previously on the pitch with the contest ending in a 0-0 tie Sept. 23, 2007, as part of the Sooner Invitational.

Belmont begins the weekend with a 1-1 record before playing at Vanderbilt Friday. The Bruins finished last season with a 13-7-3 ledger. Head coach Lisa Howe's squad defeated UT-Martin, 2-1, in its last outing before the weekend.

Jayme Trocino has netted the only two goals on the season for the Bruins. In net, Sari Lin has seven saves in the two matches.

The Blue Raiders and Bruins have played 10 times in the series with MT holding a slight 6-4 advantage. Sunday's tilt will mark the sixth game to be played in Murfreesboro.

Middle Tennessee opened the campaign by playing three of its first four contests on the road and enters the weekend with a 3-1 record. The Blue Raiders are outscoring their opponents by a 17-6 margin with sophomore forward Shan Jones leading the way with four goals. She tallied all four of her scores in the only home match, an 11-1 victory over Alabama A&M August 23, and earned Sun Belt Player of the Week accolades for her efforts.

Ten different MT players have scored this season with three others having at least one assist in a well-balanced offensive attack for Rhoden's squad. Sophomore Rebecca Cushing has started all four matches in the cage, grabbing 15 saves and registering a 1.45 goals-against average.

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