Sun Belt schedule opens this weekend for Blue Raider soccer

MT to face FIU, Florida Atlantic

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Off to the best start in school history, the Middle Tennessee soccer team will open its Sun Belt slate with a pair of matches this weekend at Dean A. Hayes Track and Soccer Stadium. The Blue Raiders will play host to FIU at 7 p.m. Friday before welcoming Florida Atlantic to town for a Noon Sunday start.

"For us, this is certainly what we have been preparing for," head coach Aston Rhoden said. "Conference is where the real fun begins because the games mean so much and they are rivalries now. There is a lot of passion and excitement during the games. I am hoping we can continue on the trend, which we are on and get a positive result. Both teams will be very strong, so we will have to do well enough to come out on top."

Middle Tennessee concluded its non-conference schedule with a 6-1-1 record, its best since starting the program in 1996. The Blue Raiders opened 5-1-2 (1997) and 6-2 (1999 and 2006) for its previous best starts through eight matches.

MT features the top-two point producers and goal scorers in the Sun Belt in sophomore Shan Jones and freshman Whitney Jorgenson. Jones leads all players with 17 points and seven goals, trailed

closely behind by Jorgenson's respective 12 and five. Jones also paces the league with three game-winning goals and 30 shots.

Eleven different Blue Raiders have tallied at least one goal during the campaign with sophomore Hope Suominen the latest to join the ranks with her game winner at Austin Peay last Friday.

Sophomore Rebecca Cushing has started all eight matches in between the pipes for Rhoden's squad. She split time in net during the Austin Peay tilt with freshman Jessica Gilchrist and senior Erynn Murray for the team's third shutout and second shared blanking this season.

Middle Tennessee is seventh nationally with its 3.63 goals per game, while individually Suominen is eighth with .75 assists per game, and Jones in 22nd with 2.13 points per game and 23rd with .875 goals per game.

FIU will enter Friday's match with a 2-4-2 record, having picked up wins at Stetson Aug. 21 in the season opener and against North Florida Sept. 13. Six of the Golden Panthers' eight non-conference matches were against fellow Sunshine State opponents.

The series with FIU is split, 5-5-1, with Middle Tennessee picking up victories in each of the last four meetings. Overall, the Blue Raiders are undefeated in the last five matchups.

Florida Atlantic is 2-5-2 coming into the weekend and will play at Western Kentucky Friday before making the trip to Murfreesboro. The Owls own non-conference triumphs against Ball State and Cal Poly, both shutouts. FAU, however, has yet to score in any of its five losses.

Middle Tennessee trails by one game in the all-time series with Florida Atlantic, who lead it, 3-2. The two teams have alternated wins throughout the series with the Blue Raiders picking up a regular-season victory last fall before falling in overtime at the Sun Belt Tournament.

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