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Cross Country Teams set for Sun Belt Competition

Both teams picked to place second at SBC Championships

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - This Saturday, the Middle Tennessee cross country teams will travel to Sun Belt Conference Championships at the Chenault Golf Course in Monroe, La., with women's race beginning at 10 AM followed by the men's race at 11 AM.

The teams enter the competition as slight underdogs as both squads were predicted to finish second in the Sun Belt coaches poll. The men's team was placed behind South Alabama with the women behind Western Kentucky.

Led by 2008 All-Sun Belt choice junior Festus Chemaoui, the MT men are poised for a strong showing at the championships. Chemaoui has won three of the five regular-season races and teammate senior William Songock has placed in the top five during four meets.

Last season, the Blue Raider men were picked champions entering into the meet. However, an injury to front running Songock in the last mile prevented him from finishing and ultimately the team finished a respectable third.

Songock commented, "Last year we had a strong team and we were disappointed with the outcome. This year we are well prepared to this point, but we have a big challenge with South Alabama. This being my senior conference meet, I want to go out there and give my best. I do not want to get out of that race and say I did not give it my all.

Chemaoui and Songock will be tasked with battling the South Alabama's top two runners, 2008 Sun Belt Individual cross country champion Micah Tirop and 2009 Sun Belt Outdoor 5,000 meter champion Zac Edwards.

Songock and Tirop train together in the off-season. He commented, "He is a good friend, but we are very competitive. When we get out there we are going to do everything for our team. He will run with the pack and try to win it in the fifth mile."

The important three, four and five runners for the Blue Raiders include junior transfer Chris Mason and all-conference runners Isaac Biwott and David Emery. Biwott garnered the title in 2007 with Emery selected in 2008 and are expected to be in the mix challenging for their second all-conference accolade.

Head coach Dean Hayes said, "The race will come down to which team's three, four and five runners do the best. Both teams like to run in a pack so whichever pack beats the other will win."

For the women, two time Sun Belt runner of the week senior Zamzam Sangau will run her last conference race for the Blue Raiders. The Uganda native was the runner up at last season's conference meet in Bowling Green, Ky. to Western Kentucky's Janet Jesang. Jesang is once again favored to take the individual title with Sangau slated as the runner up.

Marla Bailey and Jackie Serem will run in the two and three spots behind Sangau. Bailey, the 2007 Sun Belt Freshman of the Year finished 11th at last year's meet and is looking to crack the top ten in a conference meet for the first time in her career. Serem has come on strong in her sophomore campaign and has proven herself and a valuable part of the women's roster.

A pack of Blue Raider freshman including Stephanie Smith, Kayla Bryan, Amber Kassuba, Alissa Ruggle, and Samantha Hunt round out the women's roster. Two of these runners will have to step forward in order for the Blue Raiders to have a chance to take down Western Kentucky in the women's race.

Hayes said, "Zam will be in there with Jesang and Marla and Jackie should be in the mix right behind the front pack."

Full results and coverage will be available following the race on goblueraiders.com and sunbeltsports.org.



Senior William Songock will compete in his last Sun Belt Conference cross country championships this Saturday at the Chenault Golf Course in Monroe, La. Songock and his teammates have been picked to finish second in the conference. (Athletic Communications) 