Blue Raiders ready to begin challenging spring schedule

Team opens play Saturday at ITA National Indoors

January 29, 2010 · MT Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - One of the nation's toughest schedules, loaded with ranked teams, will be the challenge that head coach David McNamara has arranged for his Middle Tennessee tennis team for the spring of 2010. Starting with what McNamara calls "a pretty good field", the Blue Raiders will face No. 8 Texas in the first round of the National Indoor Qualifying tournament in Austin, Texas. The opening tournament features the 64 top-ranked teams in the country, and it doesn't get any easier from that point on. Immediately after that, Middle Tennessee will play seven consecutive ranked teams on the road, starting with Tennessee. The rugged stretch of matches also includes Denver, New Mexico and South Florida. McNamara believes that strong competition is the key to success. "In the National Indoors, we were allowed to pick where we wanted to go, and I picked Texas," said McNamara. "I like playing a strong schedule, playing the best. I think, individually, it helps the guys. Even if we don't win, we get to play two matches against two very good teams, and that helps us down the road." Middle Tennessee begins the 2010 spring season ranked 56th in the Intercollegiate Tennis Association Preseason Poll. Middle Tennessee loses only one senior, Morgan Richard, off of last year's team that finished with a 16-10 record and swept thru Sun Belt Conference opponents to claim the league championship in May. Overall, the Blue Raiders finished 57th in the national rankings, their highest since 2006. Returning are junior John Peers and sophomore Victor Melo who led the Blue Raiders to the Sun Belt Conference title. Peers, a junior from Melbourne, Australia, won at No. 1 singles, then Peers and Victor Melo took the No. 1 doubles. Peers was named SBC Player of the Year. Peers and Melo teamed up a number of times during the season in doubles and ranked at the #59 position. The duo is ranked 23rd in the ITA Preseason Poll. Peers ended singles play 24-3 overall, and 20-1 in duals. "Peers has been great for us the last two years," said McNamara. McNamara's Blue Raiders face the season with optimism, but also with some areas of concern, particularly with injuries. Redshirt junior Richard Cowden, from Durban, South Africa, has

been injury plagued his entire MTSU career. He tore an ACL two days into what would have been his freshman year, then suffered a wrist injury early in his second year and had a cyst removed from his wrist last spring. "Although he is a junior in eligibility, he has never been thru a full spring, or a conference tournament," noted McNamara. "Athletically, Richard is a sophomore. Academically, he is going to graduate in May. He is healthy now, and I am looking for him to play a big role on this team." Matthew Langley, a sophomore from West Beach, Australia, is another Blue Raider that McNamara hopes is healthy and ready to play. Langley came in last spring, but missed most of the spring with a stress fracture, then developed Mono in the fall, but seems to have regained his health now. Melo, from Maringa, Brazil, was also in and out of the lineup last spring with a hamstring strain. "He comes with a very good resume, and has already played in a lot of big tournaments. He is 22 and has more experience than most sophomores. He's in and out of the rankings, and he is the real deal," said McNamara. Melo has impressed McNamara with his improved work ethic since he arrived at MTSU. "He had never spent much time off the court improving his game, and now he is working hard in the gym and getting stronger and losing weight. He has been very committed the last six months, and I am excited to see what he can do this spring. The lone newcomer, joining the team this spring, is freshman Shaun Waters a native of Melbourne, Australia. "I'm excited about him being here. Watching him in practice, I am impressed by him," noted McNamara. "He has a strong serve, a good forehand and backhand, and volley's well. You never know for sure about freshmen, but I feel like he can help us. We lost Morgan (Richard) from last year, but I think Shaun can help us replace him." Overall, McNamara sees a tough schedule being a real challenge for his team. "I think we may be better individually than as a team in a lot of matches," pointed out McNamara. "And we need to keep everybody well this season."

Printed on March 7, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/43520