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Women's Golf looks to start strong

Blue Raiders travel to Charleston, S.C. to open spring season this weekend

MT Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn.-- The Middle Tennessee women's golf team is looking to open the spring season strong this weekend as the Blue Raiders head to Charleston, S.C. to compete in the 2010 Kiawah Island Intercollegiate. MT will be one of 35 schools competing in the event. The Blue Raiders are coming off a fall season that saw respectable finishes in both the Duramed MAC Preview and the UAB Fall Beach Blast.

The Blue Raiders are expecting big things from a pair of freshmen this season in [Olivia Love](#) and [Ashley Haggard](#). Love, a Columbia, Tenn. native, led the team in the fall with a stroke average of 76.73, and shot a round of 70 in the final round of the Bettie Lou Evans Fall Invite. Her round of 70 was the best from any MT women's golfer in the fall. Haggard, a Savannah, Tenn. native, had the second lowest stroke average on the team, averaging 78.45 per round. She also tied for the second lowest round on the team in the fall with a round of 74 in both the final round of the Bettie Lou Evans Fall Invite and in the opening round of the UAB Fall Beach Blast.

"Overall, the fall went pretty well with three new freshmen, two of which finished first and second on the team in scoring average," said coach Chris Adams. "[Olivia Love](#) had a very strong fall, and I know believes she can improve areas of her game and course management. [Ashley Haggard](#) finished second on the team and is really looking to improve her consistency. She believes she can beat anyone on the field on any given day, and as a coach, I love to see that competitive side!"

[Stephanie Smith](#), a Nashville native, rounds out the freshman class for MT. "Stephanie had a tough start in Kentucky, but she showed solid improvement by the end of the season at the UAB Beach blast. She had a very good high school and junior career, and I know she can get it going again," added Adams.

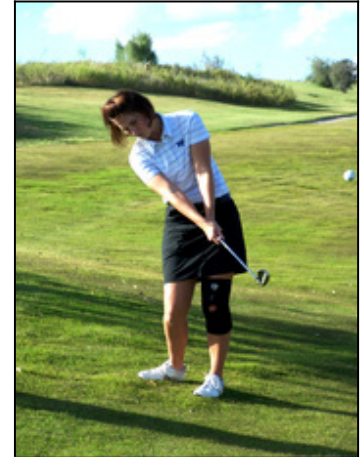
The Blue Raiders are also expecting solid contributions from a trio of returning players. Junior [Morgan Hale](#) was third on the team in stroke average in the fall at 78.89 strokes per round. Sophomores [Karisa Akin](#) and [Steph Gough](#) were significant contributors last season. Gough was the top returning Raider with a stroke average of 77.57 in 2008-09, and Akin was second in average at 78.59.

"The upperclassmen are definitely looking to make a statement this spring. [Morgan Hale](#) had a pretty good fall, but has to find a little bit more consistency in her day-to-day scores. [Karisa Akin](#) was disappointed to participate in only two tournaments, but she's committed to making a difference this spring and building on her great freshman season. [Steph Gough](#) had a good first tournament in Kentucky, but struggled a bit with confidence through the rest of the fall," said coach Adams.

The Blue Raiders expect a lot from the lone senior on the squad, [Clara Leathers](#). "Clara has been the vocal leader on and off the course, and she wants her last semester to be a great one," said Adams. "I'm starting to see signs that she is stepping up her game."

Middle Tennessee will be preparing for the Kiawah Island Intercollegiate with a warm-up Friday against the University of Toledo at The Links at Stono Ferry in Charleston, S.C. After getting in some practice rounds on Saturday, the Blue Raiders will open up play in the tournament on Sunday morning.

Fans can follow the scoring at www.golfstat.com, and further daily coverage at www.goblueraiders.com



Freshman Olivia Love leads the Blue Raiders into the spring season after an impressive fall campaign. (Chris Adams)

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