Softball to play seven games in five days

Team opens conference play at Troy on Wednesday

March 2, 2010 · Christian Lemon

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee softball team enters the busiest stretch of its 2010 schedule as they set to play seven games in the next five days, kicking off with the conference opening series verses Troy followed by a trip to Athens, Ga. to take part in the Bulldog Invitational over the weekend.

Wednesday's doubleheader and Thursday's single game with Troy will renew a rivalry that has been in existence since the beginning of both programs in the mid-90's. The two squads have met 41 times in the last 15 seasons, with Troy holding the series lead 24-17. In 2009, the Trojans left a salty taste in the mouths of the Blue Raiders, sweeping the three game set in Murfreesboro. This was payback for the 2008 Raider's series win at Troy.

"You want to play a good team when you enter the conference season," said head coach Sue Nevar. "These two teams are familiar with each other. We are heated rivals, so the excitement levels and productivity should be very high. Our sophomores know what it felt like last year to get beaten at home, but the upper-classman know how good it felt to win the series in 2008. They don't forget very easily."

In the early goings the 2010, Middle Tennessee has been snakebit by poor weather and

cancelations, having six of their first eleven games postponed from the unplayable conditions.

"We have not played as much as we would have hoped, but we took a lot of positives from our series in Kennesaw. Practice has been very productive for us this week and we are ready to get some games in."

In the series with Troy, Middle Tennessee's task will be to shut down the hard hitting Trojans offense. In the team's first 13 games, Troy has averaged under just four and half runs a game. Trojan sophomore Hayden Gann and freshman Courtney Cherry have driven a combined 28 runs. Middle Tennessee pitcher Lindsey Vander Lugt must be on her game in order to take home victory. Vander Lugt will pass Middle Tennessee great Jennifer Martinez for the most appearances by a Blue Raider pitcher in this series. The two are currently tied with 134 each.

In the 2008, the Olympia, Wash. native stifled the Trojan offense in three games of work giving up just five earned runs on 16 hits in 16.1 innings of work striking out 11 batters. In the first game of the series, Vander Lugt pitched a full seven innings giving up one run with five strikeouts. In the second game, Vander Lugt came in for 3.1 innings of relief combining with Kellie Head for a five inning shutout, helping the team win in an 11-0 in mercy-rule fashion.

At the plate, the Blue Raiders will face Troy's Ashlyn Williams who brings in an ERA of 1.71 and a 7-3 record. Williams a phenomenal off-speed thrower, has excellent change-up that Nevar wants to neutralize.

"Our goal is to attack on offense and not let her set into a rhythm. Caitlin (McLure) and Kelsey (Dortch) bring us great speed at the top of our order and we must get runners on early and often."

The opening game of Wednesday's doubleheader will begin at 1 p.m. followed by the second game at 3 p.m. Thursday's single game will begin at noon.

The team has a quick turnaround after the series at Troy as they then travel to Athens, Ga. for the Bulldog Invitational on Friday. Teams from Minnesota, Elon, Belmont and Georgia will be present. Lifetime, the Blue Raiders hold a 16-4 series advantage over Belmont and a 2-0 record against Elon. This will be the first time in program's history the team will face both Minnesota and host Georgia.

Momentum is the key going into the second tournament of the season. Nevar is pushing the positives the team will get after playing Troy as they move forth into upcoming games.

"We are about to play a bunch of games and we must win as many as we can. Our goal is to attack and continue attacking from game to game and series to series. This is a fickle game and teams can come off a large defeat and start the second game with a clean slate and beat you. This is a business and we must take care of our business."

Livestats and full results for each game will be available on GoBlueRaiders.com.

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