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Blue Raiders off to Steel City as No. 10 seed to face Mississippi State

Middle Tennessee to face SEC opponent for seventh time

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team will travel to Pittsburgh, Pa., for the NCAA Tournament First and Second Rounds as a No. 10 seed in the Dayton Region, setting up a meeting with No. 7 seed Mississippi State at approximately 1:30 p.m. Central Sunday. The Blue Raiders are making their 13th overall appearance in the field, which was announced live on ESPN with the network doing a live look-in on the team at the Murfreesboro Embassy Suites Monday night with over 1,000 fans and supporters in attendance.

Middle Tennessee's game with the Bulldogs will be broadcast on ESPN from the Petersen Events Center, a 12,508-seat venue.

The Blue Raiders enter the tournament with a 25-5 record and No. 24 ranking in the ESPN/USA Today Coaches' Poll and No. 27 in the Associated Press Poll, their second-straight week being listed among the Top 25. Middle Tennessee earned an entry into the 64-team field after garnering the Sun Belt's automatic bid.

The victor of MT's game with Mississippi State will face the winner of No. 8 nationally ranked and No. 2 seed Ohio State and No. 15 seed St. Francis (Pa.) in the Second Round Tuesday.

The Blue Raiders and Bulldogs have met six times over the years, but not since 1990. Four of the six meetings have been at neutral sites and Middle Tennessee owns a 4-2 all-time series advantage against the Southeastern Conference foe. The Blue Raiders have won three straight in the series. MT has never faced Ohio State or St. Francis (Pa.).

Mississippi State brings a 19-12 overall mark and 9-7 SEC record into the contest. The Bulldogs, led by leading scorer Alexis Rack with 17.1 ppg., has five players in double figure scoring. Armelie Lumanu with 7.2 rpg is the top collector on the boards for head coach Sharon Fanning-Otis, who is in her 15th season in charge of the program in Starkville, Miss.

Middle Tennessee is 5-12 in its 12 previous NCAA Tournament appearances, including a 60-59 loss as a No. 8 seed last season at No. 9 seed Michigan State in East Lansing, Mich., in the Berkeley Region. The Blue Raiders are 1-3 in three NCAA Tournament berths under head coach Rick Insell, reaching the event in 2006, 2007 and 2009 prior to this year.

Senior All-American [Alysha Clark](#) leads the Middle Tennessee attack, leading the country with 28.7 ppg. She was the top scorer in the nation a year ago with 27.5 ppg and is complemented by three other seniors ([Brandi Brown](#), [Chelsia Lymon](#), [Jackie Pickel](#)) who also netted their respective 1,000th career point as Blue Raiders this season, making Middle Tennessee just the sixth program in NCAA history to accomplish the feat.

As a team, the Blue Raiders are among the Top 10 nationally for 3-pointers made per game (2nd, 10.0), turnover margin (2nd, +7.63), scoring offense (3rd, 81.4), steals per game (5th, 12.5), scoring margin (8th, +17.3), field goal percentage (8th, 46.3), assists per game (8th, 17.8) and assist/turnover ratio (10th, +1.12).



Brandi Brown celebrates the Blue Raiders' NCAA Tournament berth. (Bradley Lambert)

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