Blue Raiders open tournament play against Trojans

Middle Tennessee is No. 7 seed

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee women's tennis team will enter the Sun Belt Championships as the No. 7 seed and square off against No. 10 seed UALR in Thursday's first round in New Orleans, La. The match will begin at 8 a.m. at the UNO Tennis Center.

"The goal of most every team in the country is to find a way to be playing your best tennis come the conference tournament," head coach Alison Ojeda said. "Our girls committed to this conference tournament last April when our season ended.

"It has shown by their dedicated practice and tournament play over the summer and fall. This spring has been an emotional ride for us. We have had a few tough, close losses this spring that have ultimately helped us to be extremely confident going into this tournament. We know what it feels like to fall a little short and our girls know they need to lay it all on the line, one match at a time. If we do so, we feel confident we could return home as Sun Belt champions."

The Blue Raiders enter the field after their most successful regular season since 2004 with a 10-9 record. Middle Tennessee closed the regular season with a 7-0 victory over rival Western Kentucky on Senior Day Sunday at the Buck Bouldin Tennis Center.

Freshman Yuiri Nomoto paces the squad with 10 singles victories. She is one of three players to win two consecutive matches entering the tournament, joining seniors Natalie Araya and Anna Djananova.

Araya and sophomores Marietta Bigus and Taylor Coffey have each tallied nine singles triumphs on the well-balanced attack. Fellow sophomore Alex Dachos picked up her first singles win of the campaign against the Lady Toppers Sunday.

The doubles pairing of Coffey and Djananova leads the team with nine victories, having won four straight. Nomoto and Carla Nava are next with seven doubles wins.

UALR closed its regular season with an 11-12 record, having dropped its last match 5-2 to in-state foe Arkansas State. Four Trojans have posted double-digit singles victories, led by Veronique Luksich's 16. Luksich and Rebecca Van Den Houte pace coach Abby Wilson's squad with 13 doubles triumphs.

The Blue Raiders improved to 12-6 all-time against UALR with a 5-2 victory February 21 in Little Rock, Ark. Middle Tennessee battled back to claim the win with five singles triumphs after dropping the doubles point.

Tournament Seeds
1. FIU
2. North Texas
3. Denver
4. Troy
5. ULM
6. Louisiana
7. Middle Tennessee
8. Florida Atlantic
9. Arkansas State
10. UALR
11. New Orleans
12. South Alabama
13. Western Kentucky

THURSDAY, APRIL 22
8 a.m. M1 No. 12 South Alabama vs. No. 13 Western Kentucky
8 a.m. M2 No. 6 Louisiana vs. No. 11 New Orleans
8 a.m. M3 No. 7 Middle Tennessee vs. No. 10 UALR
3 p.m. M4 No. 5 ULM vs. Match 1 winner
3 p.m. M5 No. 8 Florida Atlantic vs. No. 9 Arkansas State

FRIDAY, APRIL 23
9 a.m. M6 No. 3 Denver vs. Match 2 winner
9 a.m. M7 No. 2 North Texas vs. Match 3 winner
12:30 p.m. M8 No. 4 Troy vs. Match 4 winner
12:30 p.m. M9 No. 1 FIU vs. Match 5 winner

SATURDAY, APRIL 24
10 a.m. M10 Match 8 winner vs. Match 9 winner
10 a.m. M11 Match 6 winner vs. Match 7 winner

SUNDAY, APRIL 25
WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH
Noon M12 Match 10 winner vs. Match 11 winner

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