Historic weekend on tap for Blue Raider soccer

Two nationally-ranked opponents next on docket

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee, already facing the most challenging schedule in the school's soccer history, will face an even more daunting task this weekend when it travels to Durham, N.C., to compete in the Duke Nike Classic. The Blue Raiders will open the event at 2 p.m. (Central) Friday against No. 1 North Carolina before facing No. 15 Duke at 1:30 p.m. (Central) Sunday in the tournament's final match.

"We are definitely looking forward to playing these two games," head coach Aston Rhoden. "You do not very often get the chance to play teams that have the history and winning tradition of North Carolina and Duke. We will treat these games as every other game as preparation for conference play and hopefully postseason."

Middle Tennessee has faced three nationally-ranked opponents previously in its history, all since Rhoden took over the reigns in 2002. While the Blue Raiders are 0-3 in such matchups, two of the games were losses by just one goal.

The team traveled to Knoxville, Tenn., to face No. 10 Tennessee Sept. 10, 2006, in the only non-league match against a nationally-ranked foe. Middle Tennessee nearly pulled out the upset, taking an early lead before the Lady Vols tallied the equalizer in the second half before scoring the clincher in the first overtime to fall 2-1. The game also marked the highest-ranked opponent in school history-

to-date.

The Blue Raiders' first meeting with a ranked opponent came Oct. 11, 2002, at No. 16 Denver. The host Pioneers mounted a 6-0 win during Rhoden's first season as the MT head coach.

He was determined not to let the same fate happen the second time Middle Tennessee would face a nationally-ranked Denver squad. During the Oct. 26, 2008, meeting in Denver against the No. 30 Pioneers, again a second-half goal proved to be a difference in a hard-fought, 1-0 setback.

Friday's meeting with the top-ranked Tar Heels, the most successful women's soccer program in history and defending national champions, will be the first in the series. North Carolina enters the weekend with a 6-0-1 mark, outscoring its opponents by a 23-to-5 margin. Head coach Anson Dorrance has won 21 national titles in his 31 seasons in Chapel Hill, compiling an incredible 696-36-22 overall record during that span.

Duke is led by former Vanderbilt head coach Robbie Church, who is in his 10th season in charge of the Blue Devils. A veteran of the women's soccer coaching scene, Church began the program at Charlotte in 1994 before moving onto Vanderbilt in 1999. He has amassed a 189-118-34 record in 16 combined seasons entering the fall. Duke currently boasts a 5-1-1 ledger in 2010, while registering a 20-to-3 scoring margin, with the lone loss coming by a goal against No. 2 Stanford. It will also be the first meeting in the series with the Blue Devils.

The Blue Raiders will be looking to bounce back from a 3-0 defeat at Alabama Sunday. Middle Tennessee has notched a 1-1 record in each of the last three weeks, and will enter the weekend with a 3-4 mark.

Senior All-Sun Belt honoree Vanessa Mueggler paces the Blue Raider attack with four goals and an assist for nine points. Redshirt sophomore Regina Thomas and true sophomore Whitney Jorgenson also have scored more than once for MT, netting a pair each. Jorgenson tallied the game winner in last Thursday's road match at UAB.

The two games will be the final non-conference tests before Middle Tennessee begins Sun Belt action at home next weekend against Denver and North Texas Friday and Sunday, respectively.

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