

February 13, 2006

## Blue Raider Softball Opens Season Tuesday

MT Media Relations

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** - Middle Tennessee softball opens the 2006 season on Tuesday at Evansville. First pitch is set for 3 p.m.

The hardships of last season are in the past, and Middle Tennessee softball is looking ahead to 2006 with renewed optimism.

In 2005, it seemed anything and everything that could go wrong for the Blue Raiders did, and although the team played through it and persevered, it was an arduous journey for the club. Middle Tennessee had to overcome a senior pitcher leaving and freshman [Ashley Katinas](#) being sidelined with an injury halfway through the year. The Blue Raiders turned to position players [Trish White](#) and [Jennifer Dorais](#) to carry the load, and although the duo had pitching experience, they hadn't spent a lot of time preparing to step onto the mound.

This season is a different story. Katinas is back and ready to take the mound. She will be joined by freshmen Samantha Floyd and Laura Moore. Katinas saw action in 18 games in 2005 prior to her injury and compiled a record of 3-13. She tossed 92 innings and recorded a team-leading 60 strikeouts.

"I feel that Ashley is one of the most coachable players I have ever worked with and an inspiration to everyone on our team" said Head Coach Leigh Podlesny. "She brings a championship mentality to the field every day."

Floyd helped lead her Gordon High School team to a Georgia state softball title her senior year. She tossed a two-hit shutout in the title game to lead her club to the win. "Sam is a great natural hitter with awesome hands" Podlesny said. "She has a lot of intangible qualities that are hard to teach in hitting. She is another versatile player for us and will be seeing some time on the mound and at first base."

Moore was named AA All-State Pitcher of the Year in Tennessee. "Laura has the unique ability to throw breaking pitches both up and down in the zone" Podlesny said. "Her ability to spin the ball is phenomenal. She is also a great hitting pitcher with a naturally powerful swing."

The Blue Raiders will also have someone new behind the plate with the departure of four-year starter [Leah Grothause](#). Middle Tennessee will have two sophomore catchers this season: [Brandi Boehner](#), who shared some of the catching duties with Grothause last year, and Illinois State transfer Katie Mielke.

Boehner, who will also spend some time as the designated player in 2006, played in 42 games last season and was tied for the top spot in doubles in a season with 12. Boehner was also ranked third on the team in RBI with 12. "Brandi's strength lies in her hitting, if there are runners on base, she's the player I want in the box." Podlesny said. "She's a great clutch hitter, and we plan to use her as the DH and behind the plate."

Mielke played in 29 games for the Redbirds of Illinois State prior to coming to Middle Tennessee. She was voted Illinois State Rookie of the Year.

"Katie is without a doubt our physical and vocal spark plug on defense" Podlesny said. "She has one of the best arms in the game and is a wall behind the plate. We are all looking forward to watching her gun down runners this season. She will also see time at either corner where her aggressive defense helps solidify the infield."


The infield is solid on the left side. Redshirt junior [Melissa Weiland](#) protects third base, and the Blue Raiders have a host of players who could make an appearance in the infield. Dorais will return to the infield in 2006 and will be joined by transfer Shelby Stiner and freshmen Justine Cerda and Mabern Barnes. Mielke may also play some in the infield as well as behind the plate.

Weiland played in 47 games and started 44 in 2005. She led the team with four home runs last season and her eight homeruns for a career ties her for fourth place.

"Melissa has all of the tools that a top player needs to make an impact in this game," Podlesny said. "She combines a great arm and quick release at third base with a powerful swing at the plate. She is the type of player that can make a difference in close games."

Dorais, who began the season in the infield and had to move to the pitching mound, started 19 games in the pitching circle in 2005.



Middle Tennessee softball opens the season on Tuesday at Evansville. (MT) 

She had a record of 2-13 and registered 25 strikeouts. At the plate, Dorais ranked fourth on the team with a .268 batting average.

"Jennifer is one of our most athletic players and one of the most sound fundamentally" Podlesny said. "She is very detail oriented in her approach to the game. She pays attention to the little things in her process and commits to executing those skills on the field. "

Stiner is a transfer from Glendale Community College. While at Glendale, she had a .360 batting average and recorded 23 stolen bases and 39 RBI.

"Shelby is one of those players that fans will love to watch," Podlesny said. "She is a graceful playmaker on defense and offense. She has good hands, foot speed, and phenomenal jumping ability. She will also bring a lot of experience and enthusiasm to our team. "

Cerda, who was a four-year letterwinner at Grants Pass High School, was voted Honorable Mention Outfield in 2005. She was also First Team Infield in 2004 and Honorable Mention Infield in 2003. Barnes, who comes from Lincoln County High School, was named All-District in 2005 and was sixth in her graduating class academically.

"Justine is perhaps the most versatile and solid player on our team," Podlesny said. "She gets the job done no matter where she is playing on defense and can hit for power."

"Mabern brings this team intelligence, work ethic, and a positive attitude," Podlesny said. "She is a great role model as a scholar and an athlete."

The outfield will be anchored by White, who like Dorais, will return as a position player in 2006. However, it isn't out of the realm of possibility that White might make an appearance on the mound sometime during the season. Other players who may see time in the outfield include senior [Michelle Wilkes](#), redshirt junior [Muriel Ledbetter](#), sophomore [Kristine Reed](#), and freshman Martha Davis.

White was voted Second-Team Sun Belt All-Conference in 2005 and led the team in appearances on the mound with 20 and started 15. She also topped the team in ERA with a 3.38 and also led the team in innings pitched with 99.1 and also paced the team in RBI with 14.

"Trish is competitive, hardworking and the most under recognized player in our program," Podlesny said. "She gets the job done day in and day out. If I had to pick one word to describe Trish it would be tough."

Wilkes, who was hampered with an injury to start the 2005 season, played in 23 games and started nine. Ledbetter, who missed all of 2005 with an injury, returns to the lineup in 2006. As a sophomore, Ledbetter was a 2004 Sun Belt Second Team All-Conference selection and had a .311 batting average. Reed played in 34 games and started 26 and played mostly in the infield in 2005.

"I really respect that approach and was impressed with Michelle's ability to get on base and make things happen offensively this fall," Podlesny said. "That is exactly what we want her role to be this season."

"Muriel is smart with a great eye in the box" Podlesny said. "She is a key hitter to bat early in the lineup because she has the ability to set the tone for our team."

"Kristine is still one of the most fundamentally sound players I have coached," Podlesny said. "We moved her to the outfield this fall, and she has made a seamless transition. Without a doubt she puts in more time than anyone outside of practice to improve her game."

Davis helped lead her Red Bank High School team to a 2005 state title over Soddy Daisy by hitting in the game-winning run. She was named MVP in 2004 and 2005 and voted Second Team Best of Preps All-Area. Davis was also nominated for the Wendy's Heisman High School Athletic Award in 2003 and 2004.

"A natural athlete with great hands, Martha has made quite an impact already in the consistency of our outfield.," Podlesny said. "She impresses us every day with her ability to adapt and compete with the upperclassmen."

Middle Tennessee will have just 12 home dates and will participate in five regular season tournaments in 2006. The Blue Raider Softball Field will be getting an upgrade in 2006, and the program is getting a new stadium. The target date for completion of the new softball complex is March 20; meanwhile, the Blue Raiders will be playing numerous dates away from Murfreesboro. Middle Tennessee has three Big 10 schools and two Southeastern Conference schools on its schedule for 2006.

The Blue Raiders will travel to Auburn February 17-19 for the first of five tournaments. For the first time in six years, Middle Tennessee will be hosting a tournament. Podlesny is proud to host the Middle Tennessee Strikeout Breast Cancer Classic, which will be held February 24-26. Lipscomb, UT-Martin, Syracuse, and Loyola Chicago, are scheduled to participate in the tournament.

"We are very excited about hosting this tournament, especially one that is going to raise money for a cause which is very dear to me personally and to a lot of our players," Podlesny said. "We are excited to have programs like Syracuse and Loyola come to

Murfreesboro to play. It's going to be a very competitive tournament for us. We are thrilled to host this event because it goes beyond collegiate softball. It combines athletics and giving back to our community."

The highlight for the team will be a trip to Stanford to participate in the Cardinal's tournament. The Blue Raiders will match up with Stanford, BYU, Wisconsin, University of Pacific, and Miami of Ohio. The Blue Raiders' last regular season tournament will be at Louisville. Middle Tennessee will face off against host Louisville and will also play Michigan the reigning NCAA Softball College World Series Champions. The club will also play Eastern Michigan and Toledo.

Other games that will highlight the Blue Raider schedule include a trip to Mississippi State and to Sun Belt schools Western Kentucky, Florida International, and North Texas. The Blue Raiders will host two Sun Belt Conference weekends when the team welcomes Troy and Louisiana-Lafayette.

The Sun Belt Conference Championships will be held May 11-13 in Miami, Florida, and hosted by Florida International.

"I think we have put together a balanced schedule that will challenge our young team," Podlesny said. "Our goal is to get as much competitive experience as we can before we head into Sun Belt Conference play."

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*Printed on May 23, 2012*

*Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/4824>*