Volleyball ready for Sun Belt showdown

Blue Raiders will host arch-rival Western Kentucky on Wednesday

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team will write another chapter in their longstanding rivalry with Western Kentucky as the two schools will meet for the first time this season on Wednesday at Alumni Memorial Gym. The Blue Raiders (14-4), who swept the Hilltoppers in the Sun Belt Tournament semifinals last season in Bowling Green, are entering the match on an impressive 11-match winning streak and boast of the best record in conference play at 5-0, but Western is right on their heels with a 4-0 conference mark and an overall record of 15-4. "It seems like every year we're playing Western to hold a spot on top of the conference leaderboard," said head coach Matt Peck. "This will be a great match tomorrow night with two good teams playing two very different styles. It should be a great atmosphere at AMG, and we hope to come out on top." Reigning Sun Belt Player of the Week Izabela Kozon has been the key to the Middle Tennessee hot streak over the past few weeks. The senior outside hitter has earned the honor on three occasions this season, and was especially deserving this week after her performances vs. FIU and Florida Atlantic. Kozon tallied a career high-tying 25 kills vs. FIU, who entered the weekend on a 20-match unbeaten streak in Sun Belt regular season contests, to propel the Blue Raiders to a 3-1 victory. On the following day, she kept her run going with 20 more kills in a three set sweep of Florida Atlantic. The Warsaw, Poland, native was remarkably efficient in both matches, hitting a blistering .370. Kozon was also a force defensively, tallying 21 digs and five block assists. While Kozon might be the focus on offense,

the Blue Raiders get contributions from all over the lineup. Four other players have recorded at least 100 kills this season, including Ashley Adams with 150 in just 44 sets played. Stacy Oladinni and Maria Szivos are third and fourth on the team, respectively, with 131 and 129. Lindsay Cheatham has 106 in the category. As a team Middle Tennessee ranks 16th in the country in kills per set, averaging 14.24. Setting duties for Middle Tennessee have been split between freshmen Morgan Peterson and Angela Peyton. Peterson, who sat out last season with a redshirt, holds the team lead in assists with 417. Peyton, a true freshman, has recorded 364 helpers this season. Defensively, Brynne Henderson has been the anchor, notching 237 digs and averaging 3.54 per set as the libero. Kozon is second on the team with 148. Kendall Howard has impressed as a defensive specialist with 121 digs, including 23 vs. FIU and Florida Atlantic. Oladinni and Cheatham have spearheaded the defense at the net, combining for 144 total blocks. Oladinni holds the team lead with 77 and averages 1.15 per set. Cheatham is right behind her with 67, averaging 1.14 per frame. As a team, the Blue Raiders have recorded more blocks than their opponent on 13 separate occasions. Middle Tennessee's match against Western Kentucky is slated to begin at 7 p.m. at Alumni Memorial Gym.

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