## Steady Jason Millard leads Blue Raider golfers during Fall season

## **Turnbow pleased with progress of freshmen**

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## MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

It's hard to catch Middle
Tennessee men's golf coach
Whit Turnbow without a smile
on his face these days. His
Blue Raiders have completed
a strenuous fall schedule, and
Turnbow saw what he had
hoped he would see from his
team.

"What we found out is that this is a really good golf team when they are all playing well," smiled Turnbow. "The issue was getting all five of them going at the same time. When we do that, we can play with anybody in the country."

Middle Tennessee played in five fall tournaments over a six-week period, which is a hectic pace, especially for a team loaded with freshmen.



Now, they will take a four-month break before the spring half of the schedule begins in February.

During the break from tournament action, the Blue Raiders will still be focusing on golf, but will also catch up on classroom work that may have fallen behind while on the road for the last six weeks.

"In addition to catching up on our academics, our main focus will be on strength and conditioning," noted Turnbow. "We have some guys that need to put on some weight and get a little stronger, and we also have a couple that need to take off a little weight and get their fitness levels up. We have four months to get that done, and we are fortunate to have a strength and conditioning coach like Michael Wilson that will go to work on that immediately."

Much of the spotlight for the fall schedule was on the Blue Raiders' heralded freshman class, but when the last putt had dropped, it was still senior Jason Millard leading the way. In the five fall

tournaments, the Murfreesboro native had two Top Five finishes and a trio of Top Ten showings against some of the toughest fields in the country.

"Jason has played in every event except one or two since he walked in here as a freshman," Turnbow recalled. "His stroke average has improved every year. He was very talented when he got here, but now he has matured as well. One of the things he has struggled with in the past is letting things that happened to him on the golf course bother him. Now, he's matured to the point where things like that don't bother him. He has been very consistent."

Millard's stroke average for the fall is 70.9 for 18 holes, which leads the Sun Belt Conference at this point. He attributes part of his improved play to using a different grip on his putter.

"This semester, I've played the most consistent golf I have played since I got here," Millard declared. "I changed the way I grip my putter over the summer. I went from regular right hand over left hand, to cross-handed. The first time I putted like that, I shot 12 under and qualified for the U. S. Amateur. I also changed my putter, too. I wanted to be more consistent and it has helped me out so far."

There are restrictions on how much a team can play each week in the off-season, but the individual players may compete in tournaments on their own. From the standpoint of his team, Turnbow has instituted a Ryder Cup-style tournament during the break.

"It's a lot of fun, and everybody gets involved," said Turnbow.

Millard thinks every golf team should do it. "It keeps the competitiveness high and the nerves going."

Despite describing himself as "quiet and shy", Millard has taken on a leadership role on the team. This suits Turnbow just fine.

"He's doing a good job being the guy that our young guys can go to, that they can lean on. When he tees it in the ground, you can count on him putting a good number up. I've seen him talking to the young guys, sharing what he has learned over the years. The more of that they can get will be valuable when those things happen to them."

Turnbow expects Millard to take charge during the break, get the guys out to practice, to make sure their attitude is good, that they are doing well academically.

"You need that guy. That is going to be Jason's role now, to show them how things get done over the break. He is doing a good job, and is filling that leadership role nicely."

With three freshmen among his top six players, Turnbow will also take the break to establish more confidence in the group.

"I believe that the only way for those three guys to get better in these types of situations is to put them in and see how they do. We can simulate it as much as possible, but until you are out there in it, playing the No. 8 and No. 9 ranked teams in the country, one of them on their home course, you can't understand how difficult it is. Our hope is that by Sun Belt Conference time in April, that experience will begin to pay off.

"Our number one learning experience this fall was at LSU, when we were paired with them and Arkansas in the final round. They are the 8th and 9th ranked teams in the country, and playing on

LSU's course. Our guys were put in a situation where they had a chance to win the tournament, but that's hard to do. What you saw the last day was our two upperclassmen, Jason and Hunter Green, shoot 72 and 71, but our new guys shot two 77s and a 78, and we still finished fourth.

"Jason and Hunter Green are immune to those types of situations, but our others were three, four, and five over at the turn. The good news is that they all played better the back nine. The next time they face a situation like that, they will be a little more comfortable with it."

Turnbow names Millard, Hunter Green and Brett Patterson as his three staples, but noted that Jordan Jennings, Paul Sansom and Brad Simons all played well in spots during the fall.

"What I am hoping is that two of them will separate themselves and give us five consistent players for the spring schedule," Turnbow declared. "At some point during the year, that will take place. They all want to play, and they are all capable of playing, so it will be interesting to see who is going to put in the time and the work this winter to get those spots in the spring.

"By early to mid-March, I will have a pretty good idea of who we are going to go with down the stretch."

The spring season will get underway Feb. 21-22 at the Mobile Bay Intercollegiate in Mobile, Ala.

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