Cross Country set to defend conference title

Men picked to place second, women picked second

October 29, 2010 · Christian Lemon

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee men's cross country team will look to defend its SBC crown Saturday at the 2010 Sun Belt Conference Championship in Bowling Green, Ky. The men's 8,000 meter race will begin at 11 a.m., on the Kereiakes Park Race Course with the women's 5,000 meter contest starting at 10 a.m.

Slated to finish second as a team in the Sun Belt Post-Season Coaches' Poll, the Blue Raiders currently sit 11th in the South Region of the USTFCCCA's weekly ranking. UALR was enters the meet as poll favorites.

The 2010 MT squad returns three all-conference runners from its 2009 roster including Festus Chemaoi, Isaac Biwott and Chris Mason. The addition of transfer Justin Cacaro and freshmen David Boiywo and Keith Davis have added depth that will make the Blue Raiders a competitive force on race day.

"We lost two of our top five from last year, but have replaced them with good talent" said head coach Dean Hayes. "Isaac usually runs well in the Sun Belt and Chris has been very strong for us this season."

Chemaoi, the 2009 Sun Belt individual runner-up, enters Saturday's contest as one of the most decorated distance runners in Middle Tennessee history. Upon finishing second at the 2009 championships, the Ainokoi, Kenya native became the first Blue Raider runner in 38 years to qualify for an NCAA Cross Country Championships.

In 2010, the senior has been spectacular winning a school record four races. He is expected to place among the top finishers in Saturday's contest as he vies for Middle Tennessee's first individual conference title since Geoffrey Lagat garnered the SBC crown in 2001.

"Festus should be in the top three the whole race with WKU's two best guys. It will be very competitive between the three," said Hayes.

On the women's side, the Blue Raiders were also picked to place second. The team has finished

second in the Sun Belt the past two seasons, but will have a significant challenge dethroning the perennial champion, Lady Hilltoppers of WKU.

Picked to retain their title, the Lady Toppers have won the title six of the last seven SBC championships, including the past four seasons. The Middle Tennessee women have never won a conference championship.

"WKU will be tough on their home course, but we have a good chance to take second. Last season we came close, losing by just 12 points. We will have to run strong to win this year."

MT freshman Deanna Brasz has led the team in all races this season and is expected to be among the front runners as she attempts to be the first Blue Raider to win freshman of the year honors since Marla Bailey in 2007. The Vineland Station, Ontario native has finished in the top four in three of five contests in 2010.

"This race will be very good for Deanna. She is young, but very competitive. This race will give her a good feel for conference competition."

Bailey is the lone returning scorer from Middle Tennessee's 2009 Sun Belt Championships runner-up effort. The senior, who has suffered through injuries in 2010, will run her first race since the Belmont/Vanderbilt Opener in early August. If healthy, Bailey could make her second All-Sun Belt roster of her career.

Other runners including Kristen Tithof, Carolyne Tanui, Alyssa Ruggle, Autumn Gipson and Rachel Islam will round out the Blue Raider women's score. All five runners have been very consistent finishing within 20 second of one another in most 2010 races.

Final results and coverage for the 2010 Sun Belt Championships can be found at GoBlueRaiders.com and SunBeltSport.org.

Projected Men's Finish

1. UALR
2. Middle Tennessee
3. South Alabama
4. WKU
5. North Texas
6. Arkansas State
7. Troy
8. FIU
9. Florida Atlantic
10. Louisana-Monroe
11. Louisana-Lafayette

Projected Women's Finish

1. WKU
2. Middle Tennessee
3. Arkansas State
3. Florida Atlantic

5. South Alabama
6. North Texas
7. UALR
8. Troy
9. FIU
10. Louisiana-Monroe
11. Louisiana-Lafayette

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