

Middle Tennessee soccer set to make NCAA debut

Blue Raiders to play No. 15 Florida State Friday

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - The Sun Belt Tournament champion Middle Tennessee soccer team will play the first NCAA Tournament game in school history at 3:30 p.m. Central Friday when it squares off against No. 15 Florida State in Tallahassee, Fla. It will mark the first match between the two schools.

"We are excited to still be playing," ninth-year head coach Aston Rhoden said. "I am not surprised we are in this position because we have worked hard for it as a team and a staff. It is a great opportunity to play a fantastic team on the road, something we are used to and have done all season. We will come out with the same focus, mentality and work ethic that we have had all season and hope that will help us get a positive result."

The Blue Raiders earned the Sun Belt's automatic bid after advancing past No. 15 Denver in the league championship game Saturday in Bowling Green, Ky. The two teams battled through a scoreless tie, including a pair of overtime periods, before MT won 3-2 on penalty kicks.

Middle Tennessee is one of 12 schools making their NCAA Tournament debut this season and enters the 64-team field with a 13-8-2 mark.

Five Blue Raiders earned All-Sun Belt Tournament honors, including junior goalkeeper Rebecca



Cushing, who was named the Most Valuable Player. She also was tabbed to the TopDrawerSoccer.com National Team of the Week for her stellar play, as she allowed just two goals in 310 minutes for a 0.58 goals-against average.

All-Sun Belt honorees also collecting all-tournament accolades included senior Fran Howells, sophomore Whitney Jorgenson, senior Vanessa Mueggler and redshirt sophomore Regina Thomas. The five players on the All-Sun Belt Tournament Team was a conference high.

Florida State will be the third 15th-ranked opponent this season for Middle Tennessee, who also squared off against Duke in mid-September. Although the Blue Devils won 1-0, it began a consecutive game streak, covering the last 15 matches, in which the Blue Raiders have allowed a goal or less. MT is 11-2-2 during the stretch, including a current nine-game unbeaten streak since a loss October 8.

The Seminoles finished in a three-way tie for second place in the regular-season Atlantic Coast Conference standings with a 7-2-1 record. FSU registered a 13-5-1 record under the direction of head coach Mark Krikorian, who has been suspended for Friday's match by the ACC office.

Should Middle Tennessee advance, it will play the winner of Auburn and USF at 1 p.m., also at the Seminole Soccer Complex.

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