Volleyball set to take on South Alabama in SBC Tournament opener

Blue Raiders hosting Sun Belt Championship Tournament this weekend

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team will look to defend their 2009 Sun Belt Tournament Championship this weekend, beginning with divisional foe South Alabama on Thursday evening at Alumni Memorial Gym. "USA played us pretty well two weeks ago and we expect them to give us a good match again," head coach Matt Peck said. "We have to play better this time around in order for us to advance." After winning the conference regular season title, the Blue Raiders will enter as the tournament's number one seed. Middle Tennessee is also seeking to become the first host school to win the event on their home floor since UALR won in Little Rock in 1998. The Blue Raiders, who have won three of the last four tournament titles, enter the event on an eight-match winning streak and have posted wins in 22 of their last 23. Izabela Kozon looks to lead the way for the Blue Raiders. The senior is one of just three current players who were members of the 2007 team, the last Sun Belt squad to win both the regular season and conference titles. Kozon, a winner of five Sun Belt Player of the Week awards this season, holds the team lead in kills with 395 at a Sun Belt-best 4.11 per set rate. She's also second on the team in digs with 203, averaging 2.11 per set. Ashley Adams and Maria Szivos have also been standout offensive forces

with 267 and 240 kills, respectively. Stacy Oladinni is fourth on the team with 192, and Lindsay Cheatham has also reached triple figures, posting 180 with a conference-best .399 attack percentage. As a team, MT ranks ninth in the NCAA in attack percentage, hitting at a .291 rate. Angela Peyton and Morgan Peterson have split duties at setter, led by Peyton's 710 assists. Peterson has notched 563 helpers this season. At the net, the Blue Raiders average 2.54 blocks per set, which ranks 29th in the country. Both Oladinni and Cheatham have been the primary blockers, averaging 1.14 and 1.05 stoppers per set. South Alabama secured the final spot in the eight-team field last weekend, and will be entering play with an 11-20 record and a 6-10 mark in conference. The Blue Raiders are 2-0 against the Jaguars this season, sweeping USA in Mobile and posting a four-set victory last month in Murfreesboro. Middle Tennessee will battle it out with South Alabama in the third match of the day on Thursday, set for 5 p.m. All matches will be played at Alumni Memorial Gym, and tickets for the event will be available at the gate or through the MT Athletic Ticket office. One day passes are $10 for adults and $7 for children under the age of 12. Students of Sun Belt institutions will free admission with a valid school ID.

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