Adams has high hopes for 2011 spring campaign

Women's golf begins season at Kiawah on Sunday

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - After a successful fall season, the Middle Tennessee women's golf team will look to build the momentum this spring, beginning with the Edwin Watts Kiawah Island Classic on Sunday at Kiawah Island Golf Resort in Charleston, S.C. "I think we're all ready to get started," head coach Chris Adams said. "We're getting tired of playing against ourselves in practice and qualifying. We had a really good fall. I think our team realizes what we accomplished last spring with the big jump in rankings, and I think they're ready to compete and hopefully continue moving up." Adams, who led the Blue Raiders to one of the best season's in their history last spring, hopes that the event can serve as a springboard much in the same way it did last year. "We had a great tournament at Kiawah last year, and Morgan played really well for us individually. We went in last spring and were ranked in the bottom half of the 33 teams that were there. We outplayed our field on the first two days, and catapulted up into the top six. I think that particular tournament opened our eyes and gave us a lot of confidence." Led by a career tournament by 2010 All-Sun Belt selection Morgan Hale, the Blue Raiders posted a three-round score of 898, which is the fourth-best team score in school history, to finish tied for sixth in the 33-team field. Hale would go on to win the Sun Belt Golfer of the Month award for her performance, which featured back-to-back career-best rounds of 70 en route to finishing in third at one under par. "I think Morgan has some

confidence going in, especially with how she did last year. She didn't do as well in qualifying as I would have liked, but she put in one of the best performances we've ever had last year at Kiawah. I feel like that should give her a bit of an edge." Also important to the success will be the play of fellow 2010 All-SBC team member Karisa Akin. The Elizabethtown, Ky., native finished the fall season with the second-best stroke average on the team, taking 76.6 shots per round. Akin is also entering the spring after a fourth place finish in the 2010 Sun Belt Championship last year. The junior's best finish in the fall came at the Dale McNamara Invitational, where she finished tied for seventh in a loaded field at five-over. "There's almost no player that I would want out there when the chips are down than Karisa. She's got a lot of heart, and she has one of the best short games you'll ever see. I think Karisa is just one of those really good tournament players, and she thrives under pressure. She had a good qualifier, and she has a bit a familiarity with Kiawah from playing there two years ago." Ashley Haggard is only mid-way through her second year, but the Savannah, Tenn., native has already secured a place in the Middle Tennessee record books with some of the lowest rounds in school history. The sophomore carded two sub-70 rounds in the fall, a feat that only former Sun Belt champion Taryn Durham has bested. Haggard held the team's best stroke average in the fall at 76.3 per round. "You can never count out Ashley on the course. She could have a couple bad holes, but you just know she'll always fight back. She really loves to play golf, and she's very capable of shooting low. She's a very competitive player and a very aggressive player. It was nice to watch her and Karisa battling it out in qualifying." Olivia Love's consistency is her biggest asset to the Blue Raider program. Of her 42 career rounds, 37 have gone towards the team's overall score. Love was a top ten finisher in the Sun Belt Championship last spring, tying for eighth. At the Susie Maxwell Berning Classic last fall, the sophomore led all Blue Raiders with an 11th place finish at eight-over. "Olivia is a model of consistency. Even on her bad days she's typically going to keep her score in the 70s. She's almost always going to give you a good score, and she believes she can win, which is important. I always expect good things from her." The final Blue Raider making the trip to Charleston will be Natalie Chrisopulos. The freshman played just one tournament in the spring, finishing at eight-over as an individual at the Great Smokies Women's Intercollegiate. Chrisopulos, a native of Rowlett, Texas, will look to replicate the successes that Love, Haggard and Stephanie Smith had at Kiawah as freshmen last season. "Natalie is a very good ball-striker, but she's still learning her way around in regards to course management. She did well in her tournament in the fall, and she played herself into this tournament in qualifying. She works hard and has been very focused this offseason." While Smith and Steph Gough will not be making the trip this weekend, Adams has confidence that both golfers will play a major role in the success of Middle Tennessee golf this season. "Unfortunately, our sport requires us to leave players at home, which makes it a bit unique compared to a lot of other sports. Stephanie Smith had a tough go in qualifying after playing a bigger role last fall, and I know she'll be back in the line up for some other tournaments this season. Steph Gough has been more consistent as of late for us, and it's just a matter of getting her confidence up. I'd really like her to get some opportunities this spring. I think she's on the verge of making a breakthrough." The Blue Raiders will begin play at the Edwin Watts Kiawah Island Classic on Sunday at Cougar Point Golf Course. Live scoring will be available at www.Golfstat.com and daily recaps will be published on GoBlueRaiders.com

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