

Men's Tennis Begins Title Defense

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MOBILE, Ala. - Middle Tennessee's 32nd-ranked men's tennis team opens defense of its Sun Belt Conference championship Saturday at 2:30 p.m. at the Mobile Tennis Center, facing either Arkansas-Little Rock or Denver.

The UALR-Denver match on Friday was tied at 3-3 when a bad rain storm blew through the area and suspended play for the rest of the day.

The Blue Raiders (15-6) won last year's conference title, 4-3, over Louisiana-Lafayette, their first Sun Belt championship, and enters this year's tourney as the top seed for the second straight year. By virtue of New Orleans dropping its program this season, only seven teams are participating in the SBC Championships, with Middle Tennessee earning a bye into the semifinals as the No. 1 seed.

Head coach Dale Short says Saturday's match is more about getting his team ready to play rather than preparing for the opponent.

"I'm not as worried about the opponent as I am about our players. We need to play relaxed and confident," Short said. "We feel pretty good going into the tournament, having won seven in a row and nine of 10. We feel like we're the most talented team. If our guys go in with the right mindset, playing to win and go after the opponent, we'll be fine."

Short said the recent spell of warm weather in Murfreesboro should be a major help during



Saturday's match and perhaps Sunday's finals.

"It's a good thing we had the hot weather at home. It's good we were able to get somewhat comfortable with the heat because that can really be a factor during this tournament here in Mobile," Short said.

Middle Tennessee is led by All-Sun Belt selections Andreas Siljestrom and Marco Born, who were all-league selections in both singles and doubles.

Siljestrom, ranked 46th this week in singles, owns a 10-7 dual match mark this spring, including five consecutive victories. Included in the five-match winning streak are triumphs over Vanderbilt's Ryan Preston (No. 42) and Louisiana-Lafayette's Evghenii Corduneanu (No. 89).

Born has also won five straight in singles and leads the Blue Raiders with a 22-12 mark this year, including 14-6 in dual matches.

The duo is ranked fourth nationally in doubles, compiling a 12-3 dual mark and a 23-6 overall record this year. They have won four of their last five outings, including an 8-2 victory over Vanderbilt (No. 40, Dufaux-Mack) on April 4.

"We know what to expect this year and that can make a big difference," Born said. "Last year, we really didn't know what to expect because we had never won [the conference championship] before. We can relax and enjoy it more this year and use the experience to our advantage."

The Blue Raiders play three juniors (Siljestrom, Born and Kai Schledorn) and three seniors (Brandon Allan, Greg Pollack and Rishan Kuruppu) along with freshman Morgan Richard.

A bracket for the SBC Championships may be found on the men's tennis page at GoBlueRaiders.com. Full results may be found at sunbeltsports.org.

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