Softball ready for Sun Belt Championships

Abel earns First-Team All-Sun Belt Honors

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee softball team will open play at the 2011 Sun Belt Championships on Wednesday as they take on host Louisiana-Lafayette at Lampson Field in Lafayette, La. The first pitch is scheduled to be thrown at 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday's matchup marks the second consecutive season the Blue Raiders have opened post-season conference play with an opening-round clash with the top-seeded Cajuns. Depending on performance, Middle Tennessee will play either FIU or Troy on Thursday.

In the 2010 contest between Middle Tennessee and Louisiana-Lafayette, MT fell 3-1 in a tightly-contested affair. Then, junior Jessi Couch tallied the lone Blue Raider run with a homer to leftfield. Middle Tennessee pitcher Lindsey Vander Lugt threw well in the game, going six innings, while allowing just one earned run off seven hits.

ULL won the 2011 series last month in Lafayette.

"Louisiana-Lafayette is a great team and it is tough having to open the Sun Belt Tournament with them," head coach Sue Never said. "However, we came here to win a tournament. To be named champions in this league, you are going to have to beat Lafayette. We might as well do it in the opening game."

Last season's loss to ULL was the fifth time the Ragin' Cajuns defeated MT in a post-season tournament. Middle Tennessee has more SBC tournament losses to Louisiana-Lafayette than any other opponent. The Blue Raiders have defeated FIU five times, more than any other opponent. All-time, MT boasts a 14-18 record in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament.

Prior to the start of the championships, Corrie Abel was named to the 2011 All-Sun Belt First Team. The senior capped her illustrious career with her best season to date. The Shorewood, Ill., native has a career-high .381 batting average which ranks as the fifth-best in the conference. Her 15 doubles tie her for second-most in the Sun Belt.

Upon being named to the Second-team All-Sun Belt squad in 2008, Abel becomes just the third Blue Raiders to appear on All-Sun Belt rosters twice in her career.

A true all-around hitter, Abel leads the squad in productivity, having driven in 28 runs off a .578 slugging percentage. She has an on-base percentage of .452. More important is how her numbers have come. Abel has a .455 season average with runners in scoring position and 14 of her RBIs have come with two outs.

"I cannot begin to tell you how proud I am of Corrie," Nevar said. "She is an aggressive, all-around hitter and has proven she belongs to stand with the best in our conference. We need to her to do what she been doing for her entire career if we are going to have a shot this weekend."

Abel is the seventh Blue Raider athlete to be named to a First-team All-Sun Belt roster. She also becomes the first to be honored as such under head coach Sue Nevar.

Post-game coverage of the Blue Raiders at the 2011 Sun Belt Tournament will be available on GoBlueRaiders.com.

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