

Blue Raiders set to open season with doubleheader Saturday

Middle Tennessee will play 15th-ranked Colorado State and Arkansas

August 26, 2011 · MT Athletic Communications

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. -

Middle Tennessee rolled into Fayetteville on Thursday evening with one goal in mind, starting the season off right. The Blue Raiders, who will look to defend their back-to-back Sun Belt championships this season, are set to open up the 2011 campaign in Arkansas on Saturday, taking on Mountain West favorite No. 15 Colorado State and host Arkansas. "We're going to be returning 11 players from last season, which is kind of nice," head coach Matt Peck said.



"This is the first year in a while where we haven't had to depend too heavily on freshmen right from the start. I think we're in pretty good shape this year, no one's hurt, and I think we'll put a nice team out on the floor tomorrow." If the Blue Raiders are to repeat the successes of the last five years, which has featured an impressive 143 victories to just 35 losses, much of the focus will fall upon the five returning starters from 2010. A significant portion of the offense will be expected to come from 2011 All-Sun Belt Preseason Team members Maria Szivos and Ashley Adams. Szivos, regarded as among the better all-around players in the conference, became the first Blue Raider ever to be named Preseason Player of the Year earlier this week. The Jaszbereny, Hungary, native had a brilliant debut campaign in Murfreesboro last season, earning a spot on the All-Sun Belt First Team and All-Tournament Team. Adams, who was a rarely used freshman in 2009, became one of the dominant attack forces last season after being pushed into action due to an injury to Alyssa Wistrick. The San Luis Obispo, Calif., native became the first MT sophomore to earn First Team honors since Leslie Clark in 2007 and was among the league leaders in kills per set with 3.06. Middle Tennessee is also bringing back one of the more intimidating duos of middles in the region in Oyinlola Oladinni and Lindsay Cheatham. Oladinni, who will be seeking her third consecutive AVCA All-America selection, ranked among the league leaders in both attack percentage and blocks per set, and Cheatham led the conference in hitting by posting a .378 rate to go along with 0.98 blocks per set. However, as Peck has stressed throughout the preseason, the accomplishments of the past must be filed away. "I always tell our

players that it's nice to have respect and recognition from the other coaches, but what matters is what we do on the court," Peck said. "I'm very excited to put an experienced team out on the floor, and I'm excited to see how they do." For the second consecutive season, Middle Tennessee will face a former NCAA Tournament foe on opening weekend, squaring off against Colorado State. "We had to go out to Colorado State in the First Round in 2009," Peck said. "It was a rollercoaster of a match, and we ended up losing in five. They went on to beat Washington to advance to the Sweet 16. I think our players remember that, but it's also important to remember that these are two very different teams this season." Last season, the Blue Raiders took on BYU on opening weekend, the first meeting between the two schools since the 2007 NCAA regional semifinal. MT was able to exact a bit of revenge, winning 3-1 over the Cougars. Following the match against CSU, the Blue Raiders will take on host Arkansas in the evening. This marks a return trip for MT after posting a 3-1 win against the Razorbacks in last year's Middle Tennessee Invitational. "I know Arkansas is going to be a different team this year," said Peck. "They gave us a hard-fought match last season. Coach Pulliza is in his third season, and I think he's going to put a very tough team out there to give us a test again this year." The Blue Raiders are 1-2 all-time vs. Arkansas, but posted a 2-1 record against Southeastern Conference opponents in 2010. "We know that both of these teams are going to be a challenge for us, and that's why we scheduled them," added Peck. "This weekend should definitely pay off for us as we go forward with our season." Middle Tennessee will begin the 2011 campaign against Colorado State at 1 p.m. at Barnhill Arena in Fayetteville, Ark. For more news and coverage of Blue Raider volleyball, stay tuned to GoBlueRaiders.com and Twitter.com/MTVolleyball.

Printed on July 22, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/54407>