Blue Raiders aim to get back on track

Middle Tennessee to take on Missouri, ETSU and Auburn this weekend

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - After the first week of the season, the Middle Tennessee volleyball team has found itself in uncharted waters, carrying winless record into the second week of play. However, head coach Matt Peck feels the Blue Raiders are ready for the upcoming challenges. "I think our team realizes that we need to make a lot of adjustments both individually and as a team to get where we need to be, and I certainly think we're capable of that," Peck said. "We're at home this week of course, which is a huge help, and I look for us to play with a little bit more focus and intensity because the competition doesn't get any easier." The Blue Raiders will begin play this week against Missouri on Thursday evening at Alumni Memorial Gym. This will mark the second ever meeting between the Tigers, an NCAA Regional semifinalist a year ago, and the Blue Raiders. Previously, Missouri swept Middle Tennessee in South Florida's tournament in 1993. "Missouri is a Sweet 16 team from a year ago, and they're 4-0 so far this season," Peck said. "We really have to bring our 'A' game, and I will keep stressing to the girls how important that is. I feel like we're going to get to where we need to be as a team, and hopefully we can accomplish that a lot sooner than later." This season will mark the fifth consecutive that Middle Tennessee has challenged a Big 12 opponent. Over that time, the Blue Raiders hold a 5-1 record, with the last loss coming at the hands of Nebraska in 2006. Following Thursday's match, MT will open up the seventh annual Blue Raider Bash, where the Blue

and White will square off against in-state foe ETSU and Southeastern Conference member Auburn. Overall, the Blue Raiders hold an 11-6 mark in Blue Raider Bash matches. Middle Tennessee are 2-2 all-time against the Buccaneers, and Friday's meeting will mark the first between the two schools since the 1997. "We haven't played East Tennessee since I've been here," Peck said. "So I'm not really sure what they will present to us. I know they challenged for the Atlantic Sun title last year, and we know they're going to come after us, especially as a fellow Tennessee school." The match with Auburn presents an opportunity for the Blue Raiders to exact some revenge as the Tigers handed MT a five-set loss in last year's Blue Raider Bash. Saturday will be the fourth time Middle Tennessee and Auburn have met, and Peck expects a strong challenge from the Tigers. "We had a great match with Auburn last year, and I think we felt like we could have won it," Peck said. "Auburn is a team that went to the NCAA Tournament last season. We already lost to one SEC school this year, I'd really like to not make it two." Middle Tennessee is set for first serve against Missouri at Alumni Memorial Gym at 7 p.m. on Thursday. The Blue Raiders will play ETSU on Friday and Auburn on Saturday. First serve for both matches is set for 7:30 p.m.

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