

Blue Raiders aim to open season strong

Women's golf set to compete at Dale McNamara Invitational

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

The last time the Middle Tennessee women's golf team walked away from a tournament, it was after demolishing a number of school records at the Sun Belt Championship last spring. The Blue Raiders will be looking to carry that momentum forward this year, beginning with the Dale McNamara Invitational at Patriot Golf Club in Tulsa, Okla. "I'm excited to get going this year," head coach Chris Adams said. "I think the excitement of last year combined with a number of our girls playing all summer will have us ready. Obviously, not having Morgan Hale this season is a big loss, but I don't think we'll miss too much of a beat. I just want to see where we stand right now, and I think this tournament is a good test." This season's Dale McNamara Invitational field features five top 50 teams from a year ago, including



13th-ranked Arizona State. The field also features Sun Belt opponents UALR and Arkansas State. "We really like this golf course," Adams said. "We played well in the event last year, especially in the first couple rounds, and I think the team likes it. It's offers a lot of challenges. Tulsa does a great job running it, and they get a pretty strong field there too. Knowing that we did well last year, I think there might be a couple teams there a little bit worried about us." In last year's event, both Karisa Akin and Ashley Haggard placed in the top ten, helping the Blue Raiders finish sixth in the toughest field they played all season. If Middle Tennessee is to continue their improvement going into this season, it will likely be in the hands of Akin and Haggard as well as those of Olivia Love, who is entering the week after an outstanding showing in qualifying. "Qualifying went really well for us," Adams said. "Love was three-under par in three rounds of play. I think that with the team being deeper this season, it's

going to make qualifying much more competitive, and as a result, it's going to make our team that much better going forward." Akin and Haggard both boost of impressive résumés entering the year, highlighted by Akin's first place finishes at both the Sun Belt Championship and Belmont Invitational, the final two events of the 2011 spring season. Haggard has also been strong in her two seasons in Murfreesboro, posting three career sub-70 rounds, a feat only out-matched in school history by former Sun Belt Champion Taryn Durham. At the 2010 Dale McNamara Invitational, Haggard opened play with a three-under 69 and an even-par 72 on the way to a ninth-place finish. Stephanie Smith and Allie Knight will round out the line-up for the Blue Raiders this week. Smith has been a consistent tournament participant for Middle Tennessee since last season and was the only Blue Raider to take home an individual title last season, defeating Akin in a playoff at the Belmont Invitational. Knight, a freshman from Knoxville, is set to become the first freshman to feature as a part of the team in the opener since the Bettie Lou Evans Fall Invite in 2009, which saw Love, Haggard and Smith all make their debut in the blue and white. "Allie is really getting thrown into the fire quickly," Adams said. "This is one of the toughest fields she'll play this year and one of the harder courses, but she's certainly shown she's capable of handling the pressure. She played really well in qualifying and earned her spot." Middle Tennessee will begin play at the Dale McNamara Invitational on Monday. Live scoring will be available at Golfstat.com.

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