Middle Tennessee set for divisional showdown at Western Kentucky

First place on the line in meeting of rivals

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - It doesn't usually take much motivation to get the Middle Tennessee volleyball team ready for a meeting with Western Kentucky, but a win over the Hilltoppers on Tuesday night would give the Blue Raiders to the top spot in the Sun Belt's East Division. The Blue Raiders may not have gotten off to quite the start they hoped for this season, but after three consecutive sweeps, Middle Tennessee is starting to put it together at the right time. "We played a tough schedule this year, and I think it's starting to pay off for us," head coach Matt Peck said. "We've won each of our last three matches, and I really like the way we've been playing and practicing recently. I think we're going to be in for a pretty good match on Tuesday. It always seems to come down to us and Western for the conference title at the end of the season. This is a big match for us." While the Middle Tennessee/Western Kentucky rivalry is heated across all sports, it reaches a fever pitch on the volleyball court as the two teams have combined to win each of the past six conference tournament titles. The Hilltoppers hold an overall 35-15 mark against Middle Tennessee, including a 21-6 mark in Bowling Green. However, the Blue Raiders are entering Tuesday having won six consecutive meetings with WKU, including a 3-0 decision on the last day of the 2010 season to seal the Sun Belt regular season championship and a 3-1 victory a week later in the Sun Belt Championship match. Western Kentucky holds the two longest winning streaks in the series, winning 16 in a row from 1983 to 1994 and 13 in a row from 2001-2006. Since that loss in the 2006 season, the fortunes have reversed somewhat with the Blue Raiders carrying a 10-3 mark vs. their arch-nemesis. The Blue Raiders will likely look to Ashley Adams and Maria Szivos for much of the offense. Szivos tallied nine kills and four service aces on Friday at Florida Atlantic, and Adams hit .500 with 14 kills on Sunday at FIU. The duo currently lead the Blue Raiders in kills, combining for 6.24 kills per set at a .281 clip. Middle Tennessee will also likely get some scoring from Lindsay Cheatham and Oyinlola Oladinni, who combined for 22 kills and 11 blocks in last season's Sun Belt Championship match against WKU. The Blue Raiders and the Hilltoppers will square off at E.A. Diddle Arena in Bowling Green, Ky. First serve is set for 7 p.m.

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