Volleyball to begin five-match homestand on Friday

Blue Raiders enter weekend with four consecutive victories

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - When the Middle Tennessee volleyball team began conference play at home two weeks ago, it was sitting at the bottom of the Sun Belt's East Division. Now, on the heels of four consecutive wins, including a 3-1 decision at 26th-ranked Western Kentucky on Tuesday, the Blue Raiders find themselves atop the standings as they return to Alumni Memorial Gym for a pair of meetings against South Alabama and Troy. "We've just come off two of the toughest road trips we'll go on this season, going to the Florida schools and Western, and ending it 3-0 is huge for us," head coach Matt Peck said. "We still have some questions to be answered, but I think we've started to turn the corner and we're looking more like the team I thought we'd look like at the beginning of the season." After Middle Tennessee swept both Florida Atlantic and FIU last weekend, the Blue Raiders ended Western Kentucky's 14-match winning streak to improve to 4-1 in Sun Belt play. On Friday, the Blue Raiders will be taking on South Alabama, who carries a 7-9 record and a 2-2 conference record into the match. Middle Tennessee holds an overall mark of 16-0 against the Jaguars, including winning all three matches last season. Saturday will be the 14th meeting between MT and Troy. The Trojans are coming into the weekend with a 12-6 record and are also 2-2 in the SBC. Overall, the Blue Raiders are 11-2 against Troy, last losing 3-1 in a tournament at Austin Peay in 1994. Middle Tennessee posted a pair of 3-0 victories in the meetings last season. "I think both South Alabama and Troy are very capable of giving us problems," Peck said. "Our backs are against the wall here and we're treating every match as if it was the National Championship game. South Alabama took a set from us last year at AMG, and Troy has put together a pretty good record this year. We cannot play poorly this weekend and expect to come away with a win." If Middle Tennessee is to be successful, they will likely look to the talents of Maria Szivos. The senior was a particularly important cog both offensively and defensively vs. USA and Troy in 2010, hitting .418 with 43 kills to go along with six aces, 19 digs and 12 blocks over five matches. This season Szivos is averaging 2.56 kills per set with 1.52 digs. She's also first on the

team in service aces with 13. Oyinlola Oladinni, who currently sits second in the Sun Belt with a .370 attack percentage, also had a few standout performances against South Alabama last year, totaling 21 kills over three matches with a .704 attack percentage. Ashley Adams, this season's kills leader at 3.68 per set, was just as good against Troy last year, hitting .310 with 18 kills and five block assists in the two meetings. "We have a number of players playing well for us right now," Peck said. "We've had some matches where one or two players have played well, but here recently we've had four and five players all putting up great matches, and that's been the difference. We're going to need more of that if we want to compete for the Sun Belt this year." First serve for Friday's match against South Alabama and Saturday's meeting vs. Troy is set for 7 p.m. at Alumni Memorial Gym.

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