

# Blue Raiders open tournament Wednesday night

## MT looking to defend title on home turf

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### **MURFREESBORO, Tenn. –**

Middle Tennessee will begin defense of its Sun Belt Tournament title from last fall at 7 p.m. Wednesday when it plays host to Western Kentucky at Dean A. Hayes Track and Soccer Stadium. The Blue Raiders, seeded fifth, will face the No. 4 seed Lady Toppers in the last quarterfinal match of the day.

“We are excited about having the tournament at our home field and in front of our own fans,” head coach Aston Rhoden said. “We know an opponent like Western Kentucky very well, not only from our battles through the years, but also since we just played them in our last game. We have to correct our mistakes from that game to have a better result. I have no doubt our players will be ready.”

Middle Tennessee earned the

No. 5 seed with a 7-3-1 Sun Belt record, the same as Western Kentucky; however, the Lady Toppers garnered the higher seed after knocking off the Blue Raiders 2-1 in overtime Friday night in Bowling Green, Ky.

MT is 5-8-4 all-time in the Sun Belt Championships, including a 1-0-2 record last season on its way to clinching the first title in program history. Middle Tennessee is 5-6-4 under head coach Aston Rhoden in the event. When the match is decided by penalty kicks after a tie, the Blue Raiders own a 2-2 record, including a 2-0 mark in 2010.



The squad's offense is led by redshirt junior Regina Thomas with a career-high eight goals and 17 points. Also adding to the Middle Tennessee attack is senior Shan Jones with six goals and 14 points, while the pair is also the top two in shots with Jones owning a slim 47-42 margin.

Senior Rebecca Cushing shores up the Blue Raider defense in with 50 saves in 1367:51 and a 1.32 goals-against average. Her six shutouts this season give her 17 in her career, tying the program's all-time record.

Quarterfinal action will begin at 10 a.m. Wednesday with FIU and Arkansas State, followed at 1 p.m. by Denver and South Alabama. The third match of the day, at 4 p.m., will pit regular-season champion North Texas against Troy.

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