Trip to Pennsylvania opens season for MT women's basketball

Blue Raiders play two at Penn State tournament

November 10, 2011 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – The 37th season of Middle Tennessee women's basketball will begin at 7 p.m. Central Friday when the Blue Raiders hit the road for University Park, Pa., to face UNC Wilmington in a neutral-site meeting in the Lady Lion Classic. It will mark the first-ever contest between the two schools, at the Penn State-hosted event.

Middle Tennessee, which welcomes back three starters and 10 letterwinners from last year's 23-8 squad, posted 124-55 and 127-55 exhibition victories over Alabama-Huntsville and Martin Methodist, respectively.

The Blue Raiders trio of returning starters, including juniors Kortni Jones and Icelyn Elie, along with sophomore Ebony Rowe, led the team in scoring during the two games. Jones topped MT with 26.5 ppg, including a triple-double of 25 points, 13 assists and 10 steals in the Martin Methodist win.

Rowe was tabbed as a Sun Belt co-Preseason Player of the Year and garnered a spot the league's first team, while Elie earned second team honors from the conference.

Rowe enters this season having reached double-figure points in her last 28 games to end last season, needing just six more to climb into the top-five list and only nine more to jump into third place on the chart.

Middle Tennessee will play in its fourth in-season tournament under head coach Rick Insell's watch, owning a 5-1 record in the previous three events. The Blue Raiders have won their last two in-season tournaments, collecting titles at the 2006 Subway Classic in Minneapolis and the 2010 UTSA Holiday Classic in San Antonio.

MT also carries a 22-14 all-time record in season openers entering Friday's game with the Seahawks, including a 3-3 ledger under Insell's direction. Middle Tennessee has won its last three season openers and this year marks the first time since 2007 the Blue Raiders will not be at home for their first game.

UNC Wilmington, out of the Colonial Athletic Association, finished last season with a 24-9 record in head coach Cynthia Cooper-Dyke's first campaign on the bench. The Seahawks advanced to the WNIT Second Round a year ago but only two starters return to the squad after it was eliminated by Eastern Michigan.

Both teams are guaranteed a second game in the tournament, facing Washington State or host Penn State Sunday also in the Bryce Jordan Center.

Middle Tennessee has never played Washington State but owns a 1-0 record against the Nittany Lions, picking up a 79-65 triumph as part of the 2005 UAB Blazer Tournament during Insell's first season.

The Cougars posted an 8-23 record a year ago under head coach June Daugherty. Penn State, which is ranked No. 12/14 in the preseason national polls, advanced to the NCAA Tournament Second Round after a 25-10 campaign led by head coach Conquese Washington.

Blue Raider fans can catch Friday's action on WMOT (89.5 FM) and Sunday's play-by-play with Dick Palmer on WMOT and WGNS (1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM). Should Middle Tennessee face Penn State Sunday, the contest can be viewed on the Big Ten Network online.

Printed on May 23, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/56461