Blue Raiders and Hilltoppers set to meet in Sun Belt title clash

Winner of Friday night's match earns the top seed in next week's conference tournament

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Matt Peck and the Middle Tennessee volleyball team might be feeling a little bit of déjà vu on Friday evening as for the second consecutive year, the Blue Raiders will be taking on arch-rival Western Kentucky for the Sun Belt's regular season championship. "I'm so excited for our players and kind of jealous," Peck said. "How many times in your career do you get to play your biggest rival on the last day of the season for a title? I think it's going to be a great match-up and hopefully a great atmosphere." In last year's regular season finale, both MT and WKU met in Bowling Green with matching 14-1 records. Led by 12 kills from former Blue Raider Izabela Kozon and eight from Maria Szivos, the Blue and White out-hit the HIlltoppers .330 to .163 en route to a 3-0 victory. The two teams met eight days later in Murfreesboro for the Sun Belt Tournament crown. Four different Blue Raiders notched double-digit kills in the 3-1 victory to secure a second consecutive tournament championship for Middle Tennessee. "Obviously Middle Tennessee and Western are huge rivals in every sport," Peck said. "But I think it's even bigger when it comes to volleyball. We've been the two strongest programs in the conference in recent years. One of us has been in the tournament championship match every year since 2001, and we've been in the finals with them a number of times." Earlier this season, Middle Tennessee made the trek up to E.A. Diddle Arena, and after falling in a close opening set, the

Blue Raiders won the ensuing three, ending a 14-match winning streak for the Hilltoppers. Alyssa Wistrick starred in the meeting, setting a career high with 19 kills. Szivos and Ashley Adams were also extremely effective, putting up 14 and 10, respectively. Adams also added four blocks, including two of the solo variety. This time around, MT is the one coming in with the big winning streak as the Blue and White have won each of the past 16 matches, setting a school record in the process. After falling at Cincinnati last month, WKU is on a six-match streak of its own and currently hold a 27-3 overall record, which ranks among the best in the country. Historically, Western Kentucky holds the overall 33-15 advantage, but Middle Tennessee has managed to be more successful recently, taking home 11 of the past 14 meetings, including each of the past seven. The Blue Raiders and Hilltoppers will square off on Friday for the conference title at 7 p.m. at Alumni Memorial Gym. Admission is free.

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