Volleyball looking to repeat recent successes at Sun Belt Tournament

Blue Raiders looking for a third consecutive title

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MIAMI - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team stands three wins away from securing a sixth consecutive NCAA Tournament berth as the Blue Raiders will look to defend their Sun Belt Tournament Championship this weekend on the campus of FIU in Miami. Middle Tennessee is entering play as the second seed, and will be looking to become just the third team in conference history to win three straight titles. "I think our players are aware of the fact that we have to win in order to ensure making the NCAAs this year," head coach Matt Peck said. "We're not really thinking about trying to win our third straight. We're more focused on playing well, being prepared for our opponents and finishing our matches strong. If we do that, a third straight is definitely within the realm of possibility." The Blue and White have a pretty successful history in the Sun Belt Tournament, holding an overall 16-7 record and advancing to the title match on six occasions since joining the league in 2000. MT has an overall 13-3 mark under the direction of Matt Peck and have won four of the last five tournament crowns. Middle Tennessee will begin this week against UALR on Thursday. The Trojans, who fell to MT 3-0 in Murfreesboro earlier this season, are coming into the weekend with a 6-10 conference record and an overall mark of 11-19. However, Peck believes they are probably better than their record would indicate. "UALR has an outside hitter who will probably be Freshman of the Year," Peck said. "She is the real deal, and she didn't play well against us earlier this year. We expect her to put together a big match. UALR came to play us after dropping a five-setter at Western Kentucky the match before, and it probably took a lot out of them. They'll be ready and refreshed to go this week." This year marks just the second time that Middle Tennessee and UALR have met in the Sun Belt Tournament, with the Blue Raiders taking home a 3-1 victory in Bowling Green, Ky., in 2009. In the match earlier this season, the duo of Ashley Adams and Oyinlola Oladinni combined for 21 kills at a .429 rate with 13 blocks, helping Middle Tennessee end a seven-match losing skid and kick off a school record 16-match winning streak. Overall, the Blue Raiders hold a 7-8 mark against the Trojans, with all seven wins coming under the direction of Peck. Middle Tennessee last lost to UALR in 2003. With a win, the Blue and White would advance to play the winner of Arkansas State and North Texas on Friday. Middle Tennessee and UALR will be the first match of the 2011 Sun Belt Championship Tournament, and first serve at U.S. Century Bank Arena is set for 11 a.m.

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