Softball signs seven for 2013

Trios of outfielders/infielders, pitcher join program

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -- Middle Tennessee softball head coach Sue Nevar has announced the signing of seven players in the 2011 fall signing period.

- **Signee Photo Gallery**

Tessa Bond, Katie Brown, Lindsey Fenner, Juli Layne, LaRi Mitchell, Chrissy Polka and Ashley Stassin all signed National Letters of Intent to play for the Blue Raiders in 2013.

Nevar and the Blue Raider staff addressed all areas of the diamond in this class, signing three outfielders, three infielders and a pitcher. Several of the signees play multiple positions which will provide Middle Tennessee with flexibility for years to come.

Three members of the class come from Illinois while two come from Tennessee – including one from Murfreesboro. The states of Oklahoma and California are also represented in this class with one player each.

“We feel this is one of our best recruiting classes to date,” said Nevar. “As a result, the expectations will increase for our program. These talented young ladies will be counted on to take Blue Raider softball to the top ranks of the Sun Belt and the south region.”

Bond is an outfielder from Stillwater, Okla. She enjoyed an impressive junior season at Stillwater High School in 2011 as she broke the school’s single-season batting average record, hitting .473

while also knocking in 36 runs and hitting six homeruns. As a sophomore, she hit .410 at the plate with a .489 on-base percentage for the Pioneers.

Brown is a catcher from Riverdale High School in Murfreesboro where she plays for the legendary Jeff Breeden who led the Indians to their first state championship in 2009. Brown's accolades include being named District 7AAA Defensive Player of the Year and a member of the Daily News Journal's All-Area Team as a sophomore and junior. She is also a two-time First-Team All-Mid State selection by the Middle Tennessee Softball Coaches Association. Brown hit .456 with 43 RBIs and three homeruns as a junior while walking 31 times and striking out just seven times. Defensively, she recorded a .998 fielding percentage behind the plate, committing just one error.

Fenner is one of a trio of players in this class from Illinois. In 19 games for the Indians in 2011, she batted .323 with 12 RBIs and two homeruns. She posted a .348 on-base percentage and an .865 on-base-plus-slugging percentage while scoring 10 runs. The Minooka, Ill., native is expected to play both second base and third base for the Blue Raiders.

Layne is an outfielder from Manchester, Tenn. During her career at Coffee County Central High School, she has hit .426 at the plate while knocking in 57 runs. The speedy outfielder has also stolen 68 bases during her career in addition to scoring 115 runs for the Red Raiders. She was named to the Tennessee Sports Writers All-Mid State Team in both 2010 and 2011 after being named Coffee County Offensive Player of the Year as a freshman.

Mitchell hails from the Chicago-area city of Aurora, Ill. She has played various positions during her high school career including center field, shortstop and third base. As a starting outfielder in 2011, she hit .319 at the plate while smashing a team-leading eight doubles and racking up 30 hits. For her efforts, she was named to the DuPage Valley All-Conference Team and the Beacon News All-Area Team.

Polka is a catcher from Park Ridge, Ill. In her three-year career at Maine South High School, she has hit .363 with a .385 on-base percentage while slugging at a rate of .582. Defensively, she has been a consistent backstop for the Hawks behind the plate, amassing a .955 fielding percentage.

Stassin is the lone pitcher in the fall class of 2011. A product of Menifee, Calif., she posted a 0.55 ERA in the circle while also hitting .320 at the plate during the 2010 season at Paloma Valley High School. Among her many accolades is being named to the All-Sun Belt League in 2010 as well as being a two-time CIF Southern Section selection. She is also a former travel league teammate of current Blue Raider shortstop Samantha Nieves.

Middle Tennessee will also benefit from the addition of a walk-on who will join the Blue Raiders for the 2013 season.

Follow the Blue Raider softball team on Twitter @MT_Softball and on Facebook at the MTSU Softball page. Also, stay up-to-date on the team with the latest softball news and information at the brand-new "Softball Notebook" page which can be found here.

2011 Fall Signees

Name, Position, High School, Hometown, Travel Team

Tessa Bond, OF, Stillwater High School, Stillwater, Okla., Oklahoma Badside

Katie Brown, 2B/C, Riverdale High School, Murfreesboro, Tenn., Murfreesboro Firebirds

Lindsey Fenner, 2B/3B, Minooka High School, Minooka, Ill., New Lenox Lightning

Juli Layne, OF, Coffee County High School, Manchester, Tenn., Tennessee Fury/Synergy Softball

LaRi Mitchell, OF/SS/3B, West Aurora High School, Aurora, Ill., Northern Illinois Thunder

Chrissy Polka, C, Maine South High School, Park Ridge, Ill., Bulls/Sox Academy

Ashley Stassin, P, Paloma Valley High School, Menifee, Calif., California Thunder

Head Coach Sue Nevar comments on signees …

Katie Brown "Katie has a powerful bat that will add some needed RBI clout to our lineup. She will be expected to develop our pitchers and also contribute in the infield and outfield. She comes from a strong background at Riverdale High School and will enter our program as one of our most prepared athletes. She will be ready both mentally and physically for the challenges of Division 1 softball and will be counted on for immediate help with our pitching staff as we graduate all but one catcher." **Tessa Bond** "We are eager to see the offensive numbers from Tessa as she enters the Sun Belt Conference. Her bat has made her a name in Oklahoma and the surrounding states with the Oklahoma Badsiders team. Defensively she is a swift centerfielder with a very strong arm. In addition to roaming the outfield, she will be developed at an infield corner position. She is expected to step in and help jumpstart the offensive production as the Blue Raiders lose some big bats to graduation." **Lindsey Fenner** "Lindsey is a small but fierce competitor who has the passion for the game that we are looking for here at Middle Tennessee. She is currently listed as a second baseman, but we will also work with her at third base to back up Kristi Marquez. Her bat speaks volumes and her "fight" will take her a long way. We are anxious to begin working her at practice and begin developing her great potential." **Juli Layne** "Perhaps the most overlooked athlete out of the middle Tennessee area, Juli is determined to become one of the best ever to don a Blue Raider uniform. Her fierce competitive nature and persistence are evident when she steps onto the field. Her excellent speed and slapping tools will make her an instant threat in the Sun Belt. We are excited to see the continued development in Juli and the offensive numbers she will contribute." **LaRi Mitchell** "LaRi may be our biggest surprise after she wraps up her high school and travel ball seasons in 2012. She has the speed we are looking for in the outfield and on the bases, and is a natural, quick athlete. Her speed is very attractive, and she has the tools to go with it to be very successful for the Blue Raiders. We are excited about LaRi's potential and growth. She will also see some work in the infield to utilize her range." **Chrissy Polka** "Chrissy's combination of quickness behind the plate and arm strength will allow her to develop into a premier catcher for the Blue Raiders. She is a solid communicator who runs the field well and confidently handles her pitchers. We are expecting solid leadership from Chrissy as well as a bat with consistent "pop" in it. She has handled many successful pitchers for her White Sox Academy travel team and should adjust to her new staff quickly." **Ashley Stassin** "Ashley comes to Middle Tennessee via the California Thunder program, coached by Val Van Kirk. She has had success in the competitive Southern California travel ball circuits both as a standout pitcher and infielder with a clutch bat. Ashley will be filling the void left by Caty Jutson, our senior drop ball pitcher, and expected to contribute immediately. Her 6-foot size allows for additional strength development and the 'intimidation factor' coming out of the pitcher's

circle will be to her advantage. We will also work Ashley in the infield as her bat is too valuable to sit idle."

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