

Volleyball adds eight in early signing period

Three state champions set to join Blue Raiders

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

After earning another trip to the NCAA Tournament this past season, the Middle Tennessee volleyball team will look to reload with eight new Blue Raiders who have signed on for the 2012 season as announced by head coach Matt Peck on Wednesday.

- **Signee Photo Gallery**

Four Tennesseans count among the eight, including Murfreesboro native Chelsea Ross, who attended nearby Riverdale High School. Ross comes to Middle Tennessee after a standout career for the Warriors. The 5-foot-11 outside hitter earned 17 and under All-America honors from both USA Volleyball and AAU while playing for Alliance



volleyball club. "I have had many colleagues call and text me while watching Chelsea play club last year to tell me how impressed they were with her," Peck said. "She's a great get for us. Chelsea just hammers the ball, and she's a great defender and passer as well. She could end up being the best six rotation athlete that the Sun Belt has seen since Izabela Kozon." Alyssa Ivey and Bri McCombs, from nearby and Brentwood and Franklin, respectively, are also set to join the Blue Raiders next year. Both play on the club level for Alliance. Ivey was rated as the top player in Tennessee according to PrepVolleyball.com, and she's fresh off helping lead Ravenwood High School to a second straight state championship last month. "From the time we saw Alyssa as a ninth grader, we knew we had to have her in our program," Peck said. "She runs their offense well and knows how to direct the floor. Her defense is amazing, and despite being just 5-7, she plays deceptively high." McCombs actually played against Ivey in this year's state championship match, collecting 26 digs while playing libero for Independence High School in the loss. "Bri is among the best passers and defenders that I've seen come out of high school," Peck said. "She is such a competitor, and she's fearless on the court. I love her demeanor and her attitude." The final Tennessean joining the team will be Shelby Anderton, who starred as a setter and outside hitter for Evangelical Christian School in

Collierville and Memphis Juniors volleyball club. Anderton was named MVP of the regional tournament, and is looking to become a four-time Best of the Preps selection after earning First Team All-Region. "Shelby is a very talented setter, but she's also a great attacker out of all three positions in the front row," Peck said. "I am not sure where she will best benefit our program yet, but I'm looking forward to getting her on campus." For the first time since the graduation of former Sun Belt Player of the Year Ashley Adams in 2007, Middle Tennessee will also boast a pair of left-handers in 2012 in Katie Bange and Becky Phelps. Bange comes to Murfreesboro after a decorated career for Pope High School in Marietta, Ga. The 6-foot-4 right side hitter helped the Greyhounds to three consecutive state championships in Georgia, posting 23 kills in the 2011 match helping the team end the season on a 28-match winning streak. Bange earned Tournament MVP for her performance and has been an All-State selection in each of the past three seasons. "Katie reminds me so much of Ashley Adams from our 2005-07 teams," Peck said. "She'll be the tallest player we've ever had here. She's strong, well-skilled and a terminator. We had Katie in camp this past summer and we were wowed." Phelps has also played a role in three straight championships for Huntsville High School in Huntsville, Ala. She's looking to earn All-State honors for a fourth consecutive season after earning North/South All-Star accolades and All-State Tournament accolades this season. "Becky is an extremely physical player, and she hits the heaviest ball of any MT recruit since my arrival," Peck said. "She has a flawless arm swing. I have never had two left-handers in the same year in my 28 years of coaching. We are really going to have fun with that." The final two recruits will be continuing their collegiate careers together after forming a formidable blocking duo for DeSoto High School in DeSoto, Texas. Jazmyne Johnson is in the hunt for a fourth straight All-District accolade after making it on the First Team as both a sophomore and a junior. She also helped Texas Advantage volleyball club to a first place finish at the North Texas Region Qualifier. "Jazmyne is one of the only recruits we've signed who can play all three front row positions," Peck said. "She is among the most advanced blockers we've had, and her back row skills are outstanding as well." Miri Shade was also a member of Texas Advantage. Shade led DeSoto with 396 kills at a stellar .558 rate this past season "Miri is another great athlete who can play a number of positions, including setter," Peck said. "She's very athletic with a high skill level, and she has a strong volleyball IQ."

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