Blue Raiders ready to open spring play

Set to defend Mobile Bay title

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - For Coach Whit Turnbow, now in his fifth season as head coach of the Middle Tennessee men's golf team, there is both good news and bad news. The good news is that he lost only one player off of last year's team that won three tournaments and again advanced to the NCAA regionals. The bad news is the player he lost was two-time All-American Jason Millard. Millard closed a stellar career by earning all-american honors and advancing to the NCAA Championships. A four-year cog on some very successful Blue Raider teams, Millard also represented the United States in the World Games in China last summer. His best round in tournament play, however, was when he shot a school, course, and event record 63 to pace Middle Tennessee to victory in the Mobile Bay Intercollegiate. Coming off of a successful fall campaign, the Middle Tennessee golf team will open the spring portion of the 2011-12 season by defending their title in the same Mobile Bay Intercollegiate on Monday and Tuesday, February 20-21. While Millard will no longer be teeing it up for the Blue Raiders, they will still be a very formidable team. This year, the Mobile Bay Intercollegiate will consist of both a team tournament and an individual tournament. This will allow teams to bring extra players to compete in the individual tournament that will run at the same time as the team tournament. Both will be played at the Par 72, 7,160-yard layout at Magnolia Groves Crossing golf course in Mobile. The defending champion Blue Raiders beat runner-up

Kentucky by 11 strokes last year. The tournament will consist of 54-holes, 36 on Monday and 18 on Tuesday. Eleven Blue Raiders will make the trip to Mobile, five of them will play as a team, while the other six will be entered in the individual competition. Representing Middle Tennessee as a team will be Hunter Green, Brett Patterson, Paul Sansom, Brad Simons, and Andrew Cho. The six individuals will be Douglas Harris, David Parlane, Jordon Jennings, Sam Thompson, Lucas Armstrong, and Dane Voss. Fifteen teams are signed up to play this year. In addition to MT and host South Alabama, other teams include Akron, Arkansas State, Illinois, Illinois State, Kentucky, Louisiana-Lafayette, Memphis, Mercer, Mississippi State, Southern Miss, Toledo, Vanderbilt, and Wake Forest. “This is a golf course that we have had some success on in the last four or five years, so it’s one that I personally like to see us play,” said Turnbow. “But this time of the year, with everyone coming out of the winter break, there is going to be some rust involved. Not only us, but everybody, so we’ll get a good feel for what we got accomplished over the winter. “By the same token, this one counts as much as a tournament in April, so it’s important for us to get off to a good start.” Turnbow also noted that Illinois is ranked as one of the top teams in the country, “and when you throw Wake Forest in there, and some of those SEC teams, it is a good mix. Louisiana-Lafayette is playing really well. We can’t go down there and play mediocre and hope to finish well. “From our standpoint, everybody on our team played down there last year except Andrew Cho, so we have some familiarity with the course ourselves.“ Middle Tennessee will be led by senior Green and sophomore Patterson. In three very challenging fall tournaments, Green posted a cumulative 8-under par. As Green went, so did the Blue Raiders. In the Carpet Capital Collegiate, Green finished 11th with a -2 total, and the team also finished 11th. In the Mason Rudolph Championship, Green won the tournament with an -8 total, and MT won the team title, also at 8-under. In the Jerry Pate Invitational, Green finished 8th with a 2-over par, and the team placed ninth. The Evensville, TN native, a two time All-Sun Belt performer, was also selected to play in the Patriotic All-American tournament, an exclusive field of 84 of the top collegiate players in the nation, in Phoenix, AZ, in December. “Hunter Green is up to 18th or so in the country, according to GolfStat. He’s one of the top players in the country, as evidenced by his fall finishes, and he is going to be the guy we look to lead us. As Hunter goes, we tend to go as well,” Turnbow noted. “But we can’t rely on one guy; it has got to be all five. He is not going to play well every time out, that’s just a part of the game. Others are going to have to step up when the time comes. I think our inconsistency in the fall may be caused by relying on him too much. “The tale of how well we do is going to be how we play in the rest of our lineup. That is where the consistency is going to have to come from.” Patterson used a solid freshman season to vault into national prominence by qualifying for the U.S. Open last summer, the only Blue Raider to ever do so, and will now be counted on to help shoulder the load at the top of the order. His 69 on the final day of the Mason Rudolph Championship in the fall helped the Blue Raiders come from behind and win the tournament. “Brett had a great winter as well. He played in two big tournaments over the break. He played in the Dixie Amateur, and then he played in the Jones Cup, which is an 84-player field, by invitation only, the best of the best, so he got some good work in over the break. “I expect him to hit the ground running. He’s worked hard over the break, but that’s not unusual for him.” Turnbow has more depth than ever this year with the addition of sophomore transfer Lucas Armstrong and red-shirt freshman Cho, so Green and Patterson will have some talented young golfers trying to unseat them for the top spots in the lineup. Still, Turnbow knows it will all boil down to how his team does in the back of the lineup. “We have enough fire-power up front in the 1-2 spots to play with anybody in the country. Can we keep from having to count 76s and 80s in the back of the lineup? That’s what is going to tell the tale for us, how we do in the 3-4-5 spots.” Lettermen returning include sophomores Jennings and Sansom, as well as senior Simons, all of whom are capable of posting low-round scores. Other squad members include red-shirt juniors Doug Harris,

David Parlane and Dane Voss, and red-shirt freshman Sam Thompson. With Turnbow's method of using qualifying matches the week before a tournament, any one of this quartet could be part of the five-man team at some point this season. "I have 11 players ready to compete, and I expect all 11 of them to be ready to compete," declared Turnbow. "And when those guys compete in the individual events, there will be something at stake for them as well. If they want to play, and get in the lineup, then they will have a chance to prove that down in Mobile. "The flip side of that is there are always some unhappy campers at home, since we only travel with five. But if we have guys that want to play, and they are pushing those that are playing, that's going to take us where we want to be in April." Live Scoring for the Mobile Bay Intercollegiate will be on GolfStat.com both Monday and Tuesday.

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