

Quest for Sun Belt Tournament crown begins Sunday

Blue Raiders aim for seventh crown in 12 years

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. –

The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team hits the road for Hot Springs, Ark., and the Sun Belt Championships in pursuit of the program's seventh title in 12 seasons and the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. The Blue Raiders begin tournament play at Noon Sunday in the quarterfinals against Western Kentucky, a 66-50 winner over ULM.

Although the game will be broadcast on the Sun Belt Network, Comcast/Charter Sports Southeast (CSS) will not be showing the contest. It will be available on ESPN Full Court and ESPN3.com in addition to SBC Extra, the conference's online stream at sunbeltsports.org.

Middle Tennessee owns a 25-5 (.833) all-time record at the Sun Belt Tournament, including a 14-2 (.875) ledger under 2012 Sun Belt Coach of the Year Rick Insell and a 6-1 (.857) mark in the previous three years in Hot Springs.

Insell guided this year's Blue Raider squad to a perfect 16-0 league record, the first unblemished mark in the conference in five years and just the seventh overall for any program in the last 20 seasons. Until this year, the last league team to accomplish the feat was Middle Tennessee in 2006-07.

The Blue Raiders placed three players on the postseason All-Sun Belt Teams, including junior Kortni



Jones and sophomore Ebony Rowe on the First Team. Junior Icelyn Elie garnered Second Team accolades to round out the trio.

Jones continues to dominate from the perimeter, dropping in a single-season school and Sun Belt record 104 3-pointers. She is the only player in school and conference history to reach the century mark and currently ranks second nationally in the category.

Rowe became the 26th member of the school's 1,000-point club in the regular-season finale victory at Western Kentucky. She is just the second, though, to accomplish the feat by the end of her sophomore campaign. Rowe grabbed four Sun Belt Player of the Week nods during the year.

Elie posted nine double-doubles and is second on the team in rebounding and third in scoring entering the Sun Belt Championships. Her Second Team honor is just the second in program history.

As the East Division champion for the fourth-straight year outright, Middle Tennessee garnered a bye into the quarterfinals. The Blue Raiders own a 4-2 overall record against the Lady Toppers, including a 2-1 mark under Insell.

Western Kentucky lost its last three regular-season games, including a 77-62 setback to MT in the final contest Feb. 26. The Lady Toppers also placed one player on the all-conference squads, as LaTeira Owens was a Third Team honoree. She also is WKU's lone double-digit scorer, although freshman Alexis Govan poured in 22 points in Saturday's first-round victory over ULM.

Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey will call all the action on the Blue Raider Network of WMOT (89.5 FM) and WGNS (1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM).

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