Middle Tennessee back in NCAA Tournament for 15th time

No. 10-seeded Blue Raiders to square off against Vanderbilt in Nashville

March 12, 2012 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team will be playing in the NCAA Tournament for the fourth-straight year, and for the eighth time in the last nine seasons, as it heads to just the short drive to Nashville, Tenn., as the No. 10 seed in the Fresno Region against No. 7 seed Vanderbilt during First Round action Sunday. The two teams will tip-off at 4:10 p.m. live on ESPN2 with Dave Pasch as play-by-play and Deb Antonelli as the color analyst.

- **Brackets:** NCAA Tournament (PDF)
- **Photos:** Selection Show Gallery The Blue Raiders extended their current streak to compete in the NCAA Tournament for the sixth time in Sun Belt Coach of the Year Rick Insell's seven seasons and 15th overall trip to the "Big Dance", including three at-large berths. The four-straight NCAA Tournament trips match the longest runs in program history, which also occurred from 1983-86 and 2004-07. It marks the third-straight year in which MT will face a Southeastern Conference foe in the opening round.

The two teams have met 17 times over the years with Middle Tennessee owning a 10-7 all-

time lead against the Commodores. The two squads have not played since a Jan. 30, 1992, meeting in Nashville, however. The Blue Raiders captured wins in six-straight meetings to begin the series in 1976 and nine of the first 10 contests through the 1982-83 campaign.

This year's Middle Tennessee team has posted a 26-6 record and won the Sun Belt's East Division outright for a fourth-straight season with a perfect 16-0 league mark. The Blue Raiders won 20-straight games during the year, the second-longest win streak in program history, and knocked off then No. 6 Kentucky Dec. 28 in Murfreesboro.

Three members of the squad earned All-Sun Belt Conference honors, including junior Kortni Jones and sophomore Ebony Rowe on the First Team. Jones ranks second nationally with 113 3-pointers made, setting school and conference single-season standards, while pacing the team overall with 17.0 points per game entering the NCAA Tournament. She tallied a career-high 25 points in three separate contests, including the Sun Belt Tournament quarterfinals against Western Kentucky.

Rowe collected four Sun Belt Player of the Week plaudits, while posting 15 double-doubles during the campaign. She ranks second to Jones in scoring with 16.5 points per game, while topping the squad with an average of 9.9 rebounds. She netted a career-best 29 points in the Jan. 18 win over Arkansas State when she knocked down a school and conference-record tying 13-of-13 field goals.

Joining the pair on the All-Sun Belt squads was Second Team pick junior Icelyn Elie. Elie scored a career-high 29 points in the Sun Belt Tournament Championship game against UALR, including matching the entire Trojan output with 19 in the second half alone. She averages 13.9 points and 7.7 rebounds per contest, ranking third and second on the squad, respectively, while leading the team with a 76.2 free throw percentage.

The trio also was MT’s representatives on the All-Sun Belt Tournament Team, giving the Blue Raiders the most selections of any school.

Overall, 12 different players have seen action during the campaign with freshman Shanice Cason and sophomore Laken Leonard garnering the most starts other than the top three with 29 and 25, respectively.

Vanderbilt reached the Southeastern Conference Tournament Second Round, falling to eventual champion Tennessee. The Commodores are 22-9 on the campaign, including a 9-7 record in the SEC. They have won just two times in their last five games entering the tournament.

Christina Foggie paces four players in double-figure scoring with 17.8 points per game. Also among the quartet is Jasmine Lister (12.2 ppg), Tiffany Clark (11.5) and Stephanie Holzer (11.1). Clarke and Holzer are the top rebounders for coach Melanie Balcomb’s squad at 7.4 and 7.3 per game, respectively.

The winner of Sunday's game will face the victor of No. 2 seed Duke and No. 15 Samford in Tuesday's Second Round, also at the 14,316-seat Memorial Gymnasium.

Duke earned an at-large selection from Atlantic Coast Conference, while Samford captured the Southern Conference's automatic bid for the second-straight year.

Tickets go on sale Tuesday beginning at 7 a.m. at the Middle Tennessee ticket office. The ticket office will remain open with special hours all day until 5:30 p.m. Fans also have the option to call 1-888-YES-MTSU or visit here to order. The ticket office will utilize the BRAA priority system to assign seats. First Round tickets are $16 each and the online link is available now here.

Student programming is offering the first 250 student tickets for half price at $8 apiece. In order to secure seats through the Middle Tennessee ticket office, all orders need to be received by Noon Wednesday. Tickets will then be able to picked up at the ticket office starting at 8 a.m. Thursday. After the Noon Wednesday deadline, fans are asked to call the Vanderbilt ticket office.

If fans are interested in a possible bus trip, please contact the BRAA office at (615) 898-2210.

Printed on April 17, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/59433