MT golfers make the turn in pre-Sun Belt schedule

Turnbow hopes lineup changes will help at Ole Miss

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -- The only guaranteed way for the Middle Tennessee men's golf team to earn a spot in the NCAA Tournament is to win the Sun Belt Conference Tournament in May. The spring schedule that Coach Whit Turnbow set up for the Blue Raiders is designed to help prepare his team to do just that.

Three of the six pre-SBC tournaments are now under their belts and the Blue Raiders will "make the turn" by starting the final three on Monday and Tuesday in the BancorpSouth Intercollegiate in Jackson, Miss. The event is hosted by Ole Miss and will showcase 16 teams from around the Southeast.

It will be played on the Reunion Golf & Country Club course in the Jackson suburb of Madison, which will provide a 7,305-yard, par 72 layout to challenge the teams. The format is 54 holes, 36 on Monday and 18 on Tuesday. The teams will play a practice round on Sunday.

The field of 16 teams will boast five of GolfWeek's Top 50 ranked teams, including Middle Tennessee, which carries a No. 44 ranking. The others are Central Florida (20th), UAB (28th), Wichita State (29th) and Memphis (43rd). Four others, Ole Miss, Mississippi State, South Alabama and Central Arkansas, also have Top 100 designations. Southern Miss is just outside the Top 100 at No. 103.

“This is a strong, competitive field from top to bottom, just what we need as we start to close in on the Sun Belt Tournament,” said Turnbow. “It is also an excellent chance for us to move up in the rankings with a strong outing.”

Still looking for consistency in the bottom of the lineup, Turnbow indicated that he will go with a fivesome that includes two new faces from the group that has produced a win as well as third and sixth-place finishes already this spring. Seniors Hunter Green and Brad Simons and sophomore Brett Patterson, will be joined by sophomores Jordan Jennings and Lucas Armstrong. Armstrong is a transfer from East Tennessee State.

The Blue Raiders opened the spring season by defending their title in the Mobile Intercollegiate and Green also defending his title as individual champion. That was followed by a sixth-place finish at South Florida when the Blue Raiders faltered on the last day with a 302. Two weeks ago came a third-place behind LSU and host Southern Miss at the Argent Financial Classic. Green won again, posting a 66 on the final round to take the individual title. Simons tied for second, one stroke behind Green.

“We need for some folks to step up and give us some help and consistency in the lower end of the order. Having to count a high score every round is hurting our chances of winning.”

Blue Raiders fans may follow their team online at GolfStat.com, as well as daily updates on GoBlueRaiders.com.

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