Back-to-back champs! No. 53 Blue Raiders top No. 57 South Alabama for SBC title

Langley named Most Outstanding Player

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DENTON, Texas - The No. 53 Middle Tennessee men's tennis team secured its second consecutive Sun Belt Championship title after earning a 4-1 win over No. 57 South Alabama on Sunday morning at the Waranch Tennis Complex on the campus of North Texas. Senior Matthew Langley earned Most Outstanding Player honors for the second year in a row after winning all three of his singles contests in straight sets during the tournament at the No. 2 position.

"This is another major step for the Middle Tennessee program," head coach Jimmy Borendame said. "With our second straight NCAA tournament berth, the Blue Raiders have become perennial contenders at the national level."

The Blue Raiders (19-7) defeated the Jaguars (17-7) in the conference's championship match for the second year in a row to earn the program's third Sun Belt title in the last four years and fourth overall, in addition to earning the league's automatic bid to the NCAA Championship. It marks the 11th NCAA tournament berth for MT.

MT is the first Sun Belt team to win back-to-back since South Alabama accomplished the feat in 2007 and 2008. The back-to-back tournament titles are also the first since the Blue Raiders won two straight Ohio Valley Conference tournaments in 1997 and 1998.

In addition, MT's 19 wins also mark the most since 1997 when the Blue Raiders finished 24-5 under former coach Dale Short.

The Blue Raiders cruised into the tournament finals with 4-0 sweeps over No. 7 seed WKU in the quarterfinals and No. 3 seed and 70th-ranked Louisiana in the semifinals. The doubles point against the Jaguars was the only one MT surrendered throughout the tournament.

"We came out a little nervous in doubles," Borendame said. "But heading into singles play, we were much more poised. Everyone seemed calm and confident."

Just like in the 2011 conference final, the Jaguars took the early 1-0 lead by securing the doubles point. The No. 3 tandem of Daniel Leitner and Cody Hall led throughout the entire match to defeat Ettore Zito and Langley, 8-5. On court one, the duo of Romain Bocaert and Alexandre Bernard bounced back after trailing 2-1 to take down Yannick Born and Marlon Brand 8-5 and clinch the doubles point for the Jags.

Christoph Lang evened the score for MT on court three with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Leitner. Zito and Langley won on courts four and two, respectively, within one minute of each other to put the Blue Raiders ahead, 3-1. Zito defeated Hall 6-4, 6-1, immediately followed by Langley's 6-2, 6-2 win over Bernard.

"Matthew Langley has three championship rings now out of his four years in college tennis," Borendame said. "He's tough as nails when it's important, and he came through again for us."

Already ahead one set and leading 5-3 in the second set, Ben Davis was able to score the final point to defeat Bocaert 6-0, 6-3 at the No. 1 position and seal the win for the Blue Raiders. It marked his 11th consecutive singles victory.

"I can't say enough about Ben's performance throughout the season," Borendame said. "He has been consistently impressive and so dependable for the win in the top spot."

The match marked the third meeting between the teams this season. USA took the first match, 4-2, on March 3, while MT swept USA in the second match, 4-0, on April 3. The Blue Raiders edged USA, 4-3, in the 2011 Sun Belt Men's Championship match to win their third SBC title.

MT now awaits its NCAA Tournament fate. The field will be announced on NCAA.com May 1 at 4:30 p.m. The 2012 NCAA Men's Tennis Championship is set for May 18-28 at the Dan Magill Tennis Complex in Athens, Ga., with the first and second rounds to take place at campus sites.

#53 Middle Tennessee 4, #57 South Alabama 1

Singles competition

1. Ben Davis (MT) def. Bocaert, Romain (USA) 6-0, 6-3
2. Matthew Langley (MT) def. Bernard, Alex (USA) 6-2, 6-2
3. Christoph Lang (MT) def. Leitner, Daniel (USA) 6-2, 6-2
4. Ettore Zito (MT) def. Hall, Cody (USA) 6-4, 6-1
5. Forrest Edwards (MT) vs. Kruger, Dauw (USA) 6-4, 1-3, unfinished
6. Dimitri Pippos (MT) vs. Bartsch, Hanno (USA) 3-6, 6-2, 3-0, unfinished

Doubles competition

1. Bocaert, Romain/Bernard, Alex (USA) def. Yannick Born/Marlon Brand (MT) 8-5
2. Ben Davis/Christoph Lang (MT) vs. Kuehne, Christian/Bartsch, Hanno (USA) 6-7, unfinished
3. Leitner, Daniel/Hall, Cody (USA) def. Ettore Zito/Matthew Langley (MT) 8-5

Match Notes

South Alabama 17-7; National ranking #57
Middle Tennessee 19-7; National ranking #53
Sun Belt Conference Men's Championship Match

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