

Softball to compete in Red and Blue Classic

Five games highlight trip to Oxford, Miss.

February 21, 2013 · @MTAthletics

[Tournament Page](#)

[Complete Release \(PDF\)](#)

This weekend's action

Middle Tennessee travels to Oxford, Miss., this weekend for the Red and Blue Classic, hosted by Ole Miss. MT will face UT-Martin and Drake on Friday, Feb. 22, at 8 a.m. and 10:15 a.m., respectively. On Feb. 23, the Blue Raiders will square off with Mississippi Valley (8 a.m.) and McNeese St. (7:15 p.m.). On Sunday, MT will close out the tournament with a 12:30 p.m. matchup with Ole Miss. All times listed are Central Time Zone.



Last time out

The Blue Raiders got off to a rough start on the 2013 campaign, losing all five of their games at the Georgia Softball Classic.

Series' history

This weekend, the Blue Raiders will face two teams they has never seen, and two teams they hold a series lead over. Against UT-Martin, MT holds a 25-11-1 series advantage, and a 2-0 series lead over Drake. MT has never met Mississippi Valley or McNeese St., and trails Ole Miss, 4-3.

Hot start

Kristi Marquez got off to a solid start to the 2013 season at the Georgia Softball Classic last weekend. Marquez hit .385 (5-for-13), including a double and a triple. In the field, Marquez racked up six putouts and a team-leading 11 assists.

It's gone

Laura Dukes managed just three hits last weekend, but all three left the park. Dukes hit two solo blasts in the first game of the season, and launched a three-run shot against Campbell on Feb. 17. Dukes is hitting .273 and slugging 1.091 this season with five RBI.

Showing patience

As a team, Middle Tennessee worked 16 walks in five games. Kayla Toney led the squad with five free passes, while Laura Dukes added four.

Hitting the zone

Jordyn Fisherback racked up 13 strikeouts in 18.0 innings pitched last weekend, and tallied 2.2 strikeouts for every walk allowed.

New staff, new goals

The Blue Raiders feature a new look for this season after the hiring of Jeff Breeden as head coach. Breeden then hired Falon Catalano as pitching coach and former Alabama standout Kelley Montalvo as the outfielder's and hitting coach. Breeden and company have taken the team "under construction" in hopes of returning to national contention.

Preseason awards

Middle Tennessee's Kayla Toney and Chelsea Good earned recognition on preseason All-Conference teams this week. Toney was voted Preseason All-Sun Belt First Team, as announced by the conference office Monday. Toney and Good were both nominated on College Sports Madness' Sun Belt Preseason All-Conference teams. Toney earned first-team honors while Good was voted second team.

Sun Belt Coaches' Poll

The Blue Raiders were chosen last in the Preseason Sun Belt Coaches' Poll, released Feb. 4. The squad failed to make last year's Sun Belt Conference Tournament, but will look for redemption this season. "With us only receiving 12 votes, it definitely shows we haven't garnered a lot of respect from the league's coaches," head coach Jeff Breeden said. "That's okay though; we will work harder and earn it in 2013."

Youthful roster

MT's 2012-13 roster features just eight upperclassman (four seniors), but several underclassman are expected to contribute heavily. Freshman LaRi Mitchell has impressed with her speed in the field and on the basepaths, and hit .368 (6 for 19) this fall. In addition, Sophomores Laura Dukes and Caitlin McClure will see innings as a catcher/pitcher duo, respectively. Dukes will likely take over the starting catcher's role after the departure of Natalie Ysais, though freshmen Chrissy Polka is fighting for the spot.

Season outlook

New seasons always brings change, and the Middle Tennessee softball program is in the midst of perhaps its largest change in history. With an entirely new coaching staff, a new strength coach, and 10 newcomers, the stage is set for this year's 2013 softball program to overcome serious adversity and bring the team back to being serious NCAA contender. The Blue Raiders return 11 letter winners from last year, but lost three of their top four hitters (Kaycee Popham, Kelsey Woodruff and Natalie Ysais) and their most seasoned pitcher (Caty Jutson). All-together, MT will have 10 newcomers wearing jerseys this season, including nine freshman, forcing them to learn quickly and minimize early season mistakes. After finishing at the bottom of the Sun Belt last year, the Blue Raiders have a chip on their shoulders and will look to compete in May.

Career records watch

Several Middle Tennessee softball players are within reach of attaining spots on the top 10 of career records, they are:

- Nina Davenport, who hit six triples last year, is currently tied with Allison Cheatham (1995-98) atop the career triples list with nine. Davenport's speed has also put her in the running for stolen base records. Though she currently is not in the top 10 of successful or attempted stolen bases, all are within reach. Davenport is 21 of 28 in stolen bases, and No. 10 in each category is 33 and 40, respectively.
- Kayla Toney hit 12 doubles last season to bring her career total to 18. With two seasons of eligibility remaining, Toney needs just eight two-baggers to reach No. 10 on the list. Toney is also listed in the top 10 of several other career records, including on-base percentage (seventh), slugging percentage (fourth) and batting average (sixth).
- With 10 home runs on her resume, Nina Dever needs just one to reach the top 10 career home run list. If Dever matches last year's season total (seven), she will move into a tie for fifth-place on the list. Dever is fifth in career stolen base percentage (.882), as well.
- Kristi Marquez has been an anchor at third base over the past several seasons, and ranks seventh in career assists (333). Marquez had 121 assists last season. The overall leader in career assists, Brittney Banania (2008-11), has 494.

Though she has battled injuries her first two seasons in the circle, Jordyn Fisherback has tallied 113 strikeouts, and is just 20 behind No. 10 in career strikeouts, Caty Jutson (2009-12). Jutson had 133 in her career. Ninth on the list is Courtney Wallace (1998-2002), with 182 strikeouts.

Into the unknown

In the first month of the season, the Blue Raiders will square off against eight opponents they have never faced before. Middle Tennessee will face Campbell and Northwestern at the Georgia Softball Classic (Feb. 15-17), Mississippi Valley and McNeese State at the Red and Blue Classic (Feb. 22-24) and Gardner Webb, Southern and Charlotte at the War Eagle Invitationa (March 1-3). Finally, James Madison will be a new opponent for MT at the Coastal Carolina Tournament (March 8-10).

Fall recap

Middle Tennessee was 5-3 in its fall season, including series sweeps over Trevecca and Columbia State. Kayla Toney hit .474 with a team-high of eight runs and three doubles, while Taylor Lee led the team in batting average (.571). All-in-all, MT had nine hitters batting over .300, and outscored opponents 32-19. From the circle, the team held opponents to a .194 batting average.

Keeping up-to-date

For complete up-to-the-minute scoring and game information throughout the season, follow @MT_Softball on Twitter, or on Facebook at MTSU Softball.

Printed on July 30, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/65908>