War Eagle Classic awaits Blue Raiders

MT looks to overcome early season slump

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Complete Release (PDF)

This weekend's action
Middle Tennessee will compete in its third early season tournament this weekend. The Blue Raiders head for Auburn, Ala., for five games from March 1-3. They will face Auburn at 12:30 p.m. and Minnesota at 8 p.m. on the 1st. Day 2 of the tournament features matchups with Gardner Webb (5:30 p.m.) and Southern (8 p.m.). MT will face Charlotte at 11:30 a.m. on March 3, the final day of the tournament.

Last time out
The Blue Raiders fell to 0-10 on the season after dropping five games at the Red and Blue Classic in Oxford, Miss.

Series' history
This weekend, the Blue Raiders will face two teams they have never met, in Gardner Webb and Southern. They trail in series history with Auburn (Tigers lead 10-2) and Charlotte (49ers lead 1-0), and lead Minnesota, 1-0. They defeated the Golden Gophers, 10-2 in 2010.

Hot start
Kristi Marquez is off to a solid start on her 2013 campaign. Marquez is the lone Blue Raider to hit above .300, and has racked up three doubles and a .667 slugging percentage so far. At the plate, she is 8-for-24 (.333) and hit her first collegiate home run last weekend at the Red and Blue Classic. Additionally, Marquez has reached base in seven straight plate appearances.

Power surge
Laura Dukes has just five hits on the season (.263), but four of them have left the ball park. Dukes hit just four home runs total last year, and will likely contend for the school record of home runs in a season. Teammate Nina Dever is tied for eighth on that list after blasting seven last season.

Bringing them in

Laura Dukes leads the team with six RBI on the year, and has two multiple RBI games. Dukes drove in three runs against Campbell on Feb. 17 and two against Campbell on Feb. 15.

All-around talent

Kayla Toney has drawn five walks this season, and is a perfect 2-for-2 in stolen bases. At the plate,

Quick turnaround

After getting off to a rough start at the Georgia Softball Classic (.077), junior Nina Dever hit .308 (4-for-13) at the plate with two doubles and an RBI.

Taking one for the team

MT's batter have been hit by seven pitches this season, and Kristi Marquez has taken three of them. The Blue Raiders were hit by just 29 pitches as a team last season.

Gaining experience

The Blue Raiders are relatively young this season, with nine freshman, but several newcomers are gaining valuable experience on the field. Katie Brown and LaRi Mitchell have started every game for MT this season, and Ashley Stassin has three appearances in the circle and four at-bats. Other freshman to see playing time are Taylor Lee, Juli Layne, Niki Campbell and Chrissy Polka.

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 catagory is 33 and 40, respectively.

- Kayla Toney has one double this season to bring her career total to 19. With two seasons of eligibility remaining, Toney needs just seven 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 three seasons, and ranks fifth in career assists (342). 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.

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.

MT on TV

Middle Tennessee's student television station, MT10, will broadcast eight Blue Raider softball games. MT10 is Channel 10 locally for Comcast users, and around the mid-state Tennessee area on channel 99 for AT&T U-verse. Broadcast games are:
March 5 vs. Troy (Noon and 2 p.m.)
March 6 vs. Troy (1 p.m.)
April 3 vs. WKU (5 p.m.)
April 17 vs. Kentucky (5 p.m.)
April 24 vs. Lipscomb (4 and 6 p.m.)
April 25 vs. Jacksonville State (5 p.m.)

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).

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.

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.

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