

Whatley, Byard on Preseason All-C-USA team

Blue Raiders picked third in East

July 17, 2013 ·

IRVING, TX - Middle Tennessee's Kevin Byard and Reggie Whatley were both voted to Conference USA's preseason first team as announced by the league office on Wednesday. The voting was done by the league's 14 head coaches.

Byard, a redshirt sophomore from Lithonia, Ga., was an FWAA Freshman All-American in 2012. The safety came up with numerous plays for the Blue Raiders all year and finished his first year with 74 tackles, a team-best four interceptions, and two forced fumbles.



Whatley, a redshirt junior, was voted as the team's kickoff return specialist. Whatley, who returned a kick 96 yards for the game-winning score at WKU last season, averaged 30.5 yards per return to rank fourth nationally in 2012.

Tulsa had the most overall preseason selections with five, while East Carolina and Marshall had four. Rice and Tulane each placed three players on the team. Twelve C-USA schools had at least one player named to the team.

Middle Tennessee, one of three teams to garner a first place vote in the East Division, was picked third with 70 total votes behind favorite East Carolina and Marshall. Defending Conference USA Champion Tulsa was chosen unanimously as the preseason favorite to win the West Division.

The league's ninth annual Championship Game, pitting the champions of the East and West divisions, will be held Saturday, December 7.

The Blue Raiders will open the 2013 season at home against Western Carolina on Thursday, Aug. 29. Kickoff is scheduled for 6:30 PM.

2013 CONFERENCE USA PRESEASON TEAM

Offensive Player of the Year

Rakeem Cato, Jr., QB, Marshall

Defensive Player of the Year

Phillip Gaines, Sr., DB, Rice

Special Teams Player of the Year

Cairo Santos, Sr., K, Tulane

First Team Offense

QB Rakeem Cato, Jr., Marshall

RB Vintavious Cooper, Sr., East Carolina

RB Darrin Reaves, Jr., UAB

OL Jake Alexander, Jr., Tulsa

OL Stetson Burnett, Sr., Tulsa

OL Scott Inskeep, Jr., UTSA

OL Nate Richards, Sr., Rice

OL Matt Shepperd, Jr., Louisiana Tech

OL Will Simmons, Sr., East Carolina

WR Justin Hardy, Jr., East Carolina

WR Ryan Grant, Sr., Tulane

WR Tommy Shuler, Jr., Marshall

TE Gator Hoskins, Sr., Marshall

First Team Defense

DL Christian Covington, So., Rice

DL Justin Ellis, Sr., Louisiana Tech

DL Greg Hickman, Sr., FIU

DL Rakeem Nunez-Roches, DL, Southern Miss

LB Shawn Jackson, Sr., Tulsa

LB Derrell Johnson, Sr., East Carolina

LB Andre Kirk, Jr., Florida Atlantic

DB Kevin Byard, So., Middle Tennessee

DB Lorenzo Doss, So., Tulane

DB Phillip Gaines, Sr., Rice

DB Marco Nelson, Sr., Tulsa

First Team Special Teams

K Cairo Santos, K, Tulane

P Tyler Williams, P, Marshall

KR Reggie Whatley, Jr., Middle Tennessee

PR Trey Watts, Sr., Tulsa

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST DIVISION

1. East Carolina (11), 95

2. Marshall (2), 82

3. Middle Tennessee (1), 70

4. UAB, 54
5. Southern Miss, 40
6. Florida Atlantic, 28
7. FIU, 23

WEST DIVISION

1. Tulsa (14), 98
2. Rice, 76
3. Louisiana Tech, 72
4. UTEP, 46
5. North Texas, 39
6. Tulane, 31
7. UTSA, 30

(First place votes in parenthesis)

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