

Blue Raider Soccer kicks off season at UT Martin

Middle Tennessee and Skyhawks faceoff on Sunday

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- [UT Martin Live Video](#)
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A fresh new start in Conference USA also means a lot of new faces for the 2013 Middle Tennessee soccer program.

MT kicks off their first season in C-USA with a visit to in-state foe UT Martin on Sunday, Aug. 25. Match time is set for 2 p.m. at Skyhawk Field.

The Blue Raiders welcome 11 freshmen to the team with 24 of the 28 student-athletes on the roster comprised of freshmen and sophomores. Middle Tennessee is just one of four teams nationally to have no seniors on the roster this season, joining Colorado State, Jacksonville State and VMI. The Raiders' youth is the seventh youngest in the nation with only LA Tech's 25 ahead of MT in C-USA.

"Our main objective this preseason was to imprint our style and system of play with our new players, while establishing good team and positional chemistry," stated 12th year head coach Aston Rhoden.

A year ago, the Raiders put together one of the most impressive seasons in program history. MT registered a 14-5-1 mark and clinched a share of the Sun Belt Conference regular season title with an 8-1-1 ledger.

Among those returning from last year's impressive squad is 2012 Sun Belt Freshman of the Year Kate Loye. The Hamilton, New Zealand product tallied seven goals and six assists for 20 points in the span of 17 games. The Raiders also return other scoring threats in Tori Hawkins and Amalie Anderdal, who both scored four goals each last season.

Between the pipes, keeper Kelsey Brouwer returns after a standout rookie season. The Franklin



product boasted an 8-2 record with a stout 1.10 Goals Against Average.

"It's beneficial that we get some leadership from our sophomore and junior class," noted Rhoden. "The experience this group gained last season will be vital to our growth this year."

The Blue Raiders face a strong non-conference slate which also includes hosting Memphis (Sept. 1) and Tennessee (Sept. 13) at Dean A. Hayes Stadium. Other strong non-league matchups include a visit to the USF Soccer Classic on Sept. 6-8 when MT plays USF and UCF, respectively.

"The non-conference schedule is among the toughest we've had since I've been here," Rhoden said. "I expect us to learn some valuable lessons along the way and I'm confident those lessons will help us when we start conference play."

The C-USA slate doesn't get any easier. The Blue Raiders enter their inaugural season with several new opponents including visits from UAB, Colorado College and LA Tech to Hayes Stadium this season.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the new league will be its' expansiveness. With a league that stretches from Colorado to southern Florida, C-USA will be the largest women's soccer league in NCAA Division I.

"The league is very balanced with some excellent coaches and strong teams," said Rhoden. "Being such a large league we won't face everyone in the regular season. We will still need to be playing well in postseason as we could face a new opponent in the conference tournament."

UT Martin is coming off the most successful campaign in program history and are set to contend for their second consecutive league championship and third NCAA Tournament appearance in as many years.

Amongst UT Martin's returnees are four All-OVC performers in Mariah Klenke, Ashley Reveiz and Hannah McGowen garnering first team honors while Alyssa Curtis was tabbed to the second team. Senior Abi Sanvee joins teammates Dominika Conc, Curtis and McGowen on the list of members to eclipse the double-digit point plateau in 2012.

A free webstream will be provided for Sunday's 2 p.m. match, as well as live stats. For constant updates on Twitter follow @MT_Soccer.

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