Lady Raiders Win Sun Belt Opener Over Western Kentucky

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Five players scored in double figures to help lead Middle Tennessee's Lady Raiders (7-5, 1-0) to a 74-62 win over Western Kentucky (5-7, 0-1) Saturday in opening action of Sun Belt Conference play in Murphy Center.

Western Kentucky committed 29 turnovers in the game and Middle Tennessee capitalized on the Lady Topper mistakes by scoring 27 points off turnovers. The Lady Raiders also won the war in the paint as the team scored 28 points to the Lady Toppers 20.

From the opening basket, scored by Eboni Kirby, Middle Tennessee never relinquished the lead. The Lady Raider led by 20 (71-51) with 1:33 left to play in the game, but three straight three-point shots by WKU cut the lead to 73-62 with 14 seconds left to play. Kirby finished the game with 10 seconds left when she was 1-of-2 from the free throw line, and the Western Kentucky's Leslie Logsdon's three point shot was off the mark as the buzzer sounded.

Kirby led the team with 18 points, and was followed by senior Paula Penttila who had 14 points and was 2-of-4 from the three-point line. Sophomore Patrice Holmes recorded her first double-double of the year with 11 points and 11 assists, and Mia Parviainen scored in double figures for the second time this season with 10. Junior Jennifer Justice was the fifth Lady Raider in double figures with 12.

Middle Tennessee will face one of its last two non-conference opponents of the season, when the Lady Raiders host Austin Peay on Monday, January 6. Tip-off is set for 7 p.m. in the Murphy Center.

POSTGAME NOTES
MIDDLE TENNESSEE VS WESTERN KENTUCKY

DOUBLE-DOUBLE: Patrice Holmes recorded her third career double-double when she registered

11 points and 11 assists against WKU. It marked the Bishopville, SC, natives first double-double of the season.

HOLMES SETS ASSIST MARK: Sophomore Patrice Holmes dished out a career-high 11 assists to key Middle Tennessee's win over Western Kentucky. Holmes' previous high was nine assists set against Memphis earlier this season. Overall, Holmes was directly responsible for 15 of the team's 24 field goals made against the Hilltoppers.

HOT AT THE LINE: The difference in the win over Western Kentucky was at the free throw line where the Lady Raiders were sizzling at 84 percent. Middle Tennessee, who entered the game shooting 61 percent at the line for the year, connected on 21 of 25 charity tosses to enjoy its best shooting percentage of the year. Paula Penttila and Mia Parviainen both hit all four of their attempts to lead the way, while Keish McClinic made five of six free throws.

KIRBY LEADS BALANCED ATTACK: Sophomore Eboni Kirby paced five Lady Raiders in double figures with 18 points on 7-for-10 shooting. It marked the fourth time in Kirby's career she as led the Lady Raiders in scoring.

THIS 'N' THAT: For the second straight year, Middle Tennessee opened Sun Belt Conference play with a victory ... The Lady Raiders have now won four straight SBC home games ... Jennifer Justice's 12 points was her most in a game since tallying 14 in the season opener ... Paula Penttila was selected the American Ace Player of the Game by the Blue Raider Radio Network ... The Lady Raiders scored 27 points off of WKU's 29 turnovers, while WKU netted just six points off of 16 MT miscues ... The Lady Raiders forced 29 turnovers against WKU, which was the second most this season behind the 31 committed by ETSU earlier this year ... Mia Parviainen collected a career-high three steals against the Hilltoppers.

Quotes:

MT Head Coach Stephany Smith: "I thought we competed well and knocked down a lot of shots, which I think gave us the opportunity to win. We wanted to play a lot more aggressively [on defense]. I will tell you our trapping didn't work. We didn't press them in a full court setting as much as I thought we would be able to do because Tiffany Porter-Talbert will just catch the ball and take it coast to coast looking for whatever is available at the basket. Sometimes that worked in our advantage. Of course, in the second half it really worked against us. So, we just went back to a half court man-to-man situation."

"We have played some tough teams, and Western [Kentucky] has as well. But, we have played four Top 20 teams and have been in these situations a lot. I would say we showed poise in the first 15 minutes but in the last [minutes of the game], I don't know how much poise we showed in the last couple of minutes. Fortunately enough, we had enough of an advantage that the three point shots [WKU] made in the end didn't make that much of a difference."

MT Guard Patrice Holmes: "I think we did a pretty good job taking care of the ball. Tonight on defense, we wanted to play their guards aggressively because that is where most of their points come from."

MT Forward Jennifer Justice: "I am just trying to get in there and make something happen whenever I get the chance.

"We knew that Western Kentucky had real good three point shooters. We just tried to keep the ball out of [Shala Reese's] hands. When we started doing that, it helped us out a lot."

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