Lady Raiders Drop Close One 65-63

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MIAMI, Fla. - Middle Tennessee (11-10, 4-4 SBC) women's basketball dropped a hard fought battle with Sun Belt Conference foe Florida International (15-6, 6-2 SBC) 65-63 Saturday in Golden Panther Arena.

After leading 41-29, Middle Tennessee went on a six minute scoring drought, which allowed FIU to go on a 19-0 run to erase the Lady Raider lead. Florida International led by as much as seven before Middle Tennessee went on a run of their own and tied it 48 all on an Eboni Kirby lay-up. Kirby gave MT the lead back with a free throw shot (49-48) with 8:32 left to play.

"I think we were shell shocked after the 19-0 run by FIU," said Head Coach Stephany Smith. "We were aggressive and had a lot of balls fall our way in the first half, and they were really aggressive in the second half and got the shots."

After trading the lead back and forth, Middle Tennessee found themselves down by one with 1:11 left to play and junior Keisha McClinic at the free throw line. After McClinic missed the front end of a 1-and-1 FIU went down the court and got a bucket by Ivelina Vrancheva who also hit the free throw shot after she was fouled to put FIU up 63-59.

Sophomore Patrice Holmes came back and answered the FIU points to pull Middle Tennessee within two (63-61). It appeared the Lady Raiders would get a chance to tie, after FIU missed a field goal attempt, but the Lady Panthers picked up the offensive rebound which Forced the Lady Raiders to foul.

Florida International went back up by three on a Vrancheva free throw, and the Lady Raiders again pulled within one with two free throws by McClinic with 6.7 seconds left to play. After Vrancheva again was put at the charity stripe, hitting one of two, Holmes raced down the court but missed the lay-up. Middle Tennessee had one last chance on a jumped ball call, but couldn't convert.

Freshman Cartia Bailey picked up the first start of her career and ended the game with eight points and five rebounds. She was given the starting nod by Smith because of her attacking nature.

"Cartia was given the starting nod because we wanted her to attack the basketball," Smith said. "She really did a great job today."

The Lady Raiders were led by Holmes who picked up the third double-double of her career as recorded 13 points and 12 rebounds. Eboni Kirby ended the game with 11 points and Jennifer Justice added 10.

The Lady Raiders continue their road swing as the team travels to Denton, Texas to take on North Texas on Wednesday. Tip-off is set for 7 p.m.

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