Lady Raiders Clinch Second in Sun Belt East

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee women's basketball (16-10, 9-4 SBC) clinched second place in the Sun Belt East with a 61-57 win over Florida International (16-9, 7-5 SBC) on Saturday in Murphy Center.

As the Lady Raiders honored seniors Mia Parviainen and Paula Penttila, in the final home game of the season, the duo also rewarded Middle Tennessee with a solid effort on the court. Penttila endeared herself to the fans even more when she hit a monster three point shot with 55 seconds left to play that gave the Lady Raiders a four point advantage (56-52). It proved fortuitous as Florida International's Ivelina Vrancheva went down the court and hit a jumper to pull the Golden Panthers back within two.

In the final 13 seconds the Lady Raiders, however, would not be denied the win. Patrice Holmes hit 3-of-4 free throws and Penttila hit both of her free throws to ice the game.

Holmes recorded the fourth double-double of the season with 15 points and 11 rebounds. Tia Stovall hit the double figure scoring mark with 16 points, since her return to the line-up with an injury and Penttila also added a double figure mark of 11 points.

Middle Tennessee closed out the regular season on Saturday March 1, when the Lady Raiders travel to Bowling Green, Ky., to take on Western Kentucky. Tip-of is set for 12:30 p.m. in E.A. Diddle Arena.

POSTGAME NOTES
MIDDLE TENNESSEE VS FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL

LADY RAIDERS CLINCH BYE: The victory over FIU on Saturday clinched second place for MT in the Sun Belt Conference's East Division. The second place finish will mark the highest regular season finish ever for MT in the SBC. The Lady Raiders will now open tournament play on Sunday, March 9 at 11 AM.

PLAYER OF THE YEAR? WHY NOT!: Sophomore Patrice Holmes proved once again why Sun Belt

Conference voters should seriously consider her for league Player of the Year honors. In the win over FIU, Holmes recorded her fourth career double-double with 15 points and 11 rebounds. If that wasn't enough, Bishopville, SC, native added four assists, two steals, and tied her career best with three blocked shots.

FIVE IN A ROW: Today's win over FIU marked the Lady Raiders' fifth straight and moved their mark to 5-1 in February. The five consecutive victories is the most by the Lady Raiders since the 1999-00 squad won 10 in a row.

BIG IN FEBRUARY: Since becoming head coach at Middle Tennessee in 1997, Stephany Smith has had a knack of getting her team's better down the stretch heading into tournament play. In the month of February, Smith has an impressive mark of 35-10 (.777), including a 5-1 mark this year.

SENIOR DAY: Today's game marked the final home game for seniors Paula Penttila and Mia Parvianien. Both players came to MT via Finland back in 1999.

PENTTILA BIG IN FINAL HOME GAME: In her final home game as a Lady Raider, Paula Penttila played a major role in the victory. Penttila played all 40 minutes, scored 11 points, grabbed five boards and dished out three assists. Her biggest moment came with 55 seconds on the clock when she nailed a three-pointer to give MT a four-point advantage, then with six seconds remaining she calmly sank two free throws to secure the victory.

THIS 'N' THAT: Patrice Holmes has pulled down at least nine rebounds five times over her past nine games ... Tia Stovall enjoyed her best game since returning from a foot injury in late December. Stovall added 16 points, seven rebounds and a blocked shot ... MT is 3-2 this year in games decided by five points or less ... Only six Lady Raiders scored against FIU and only seven points came from the bench ... Patrice Holmes now needs just eight more steals to set a new single-season record at MT.

QUOTES

MT Head Coach Stephany Smith: "They are a great basketball team. They have a great tradition and a lot of history. They have had a tremendous amount of success. Sometimes, not that they are not good because they are very talented, after you have had so much success and tradition, you can win for another decade whether you have a lot of talent or not. But, they have a tremendous amount of talent. We are very fortunate that we came out with the win tonight. Part of the lull was when Patrice [Holmes] went down with an injury and Tia [Stovall] went down with an injury. Those are two key players for us to not have in the game."

MT Center Tia Stovall: "For the past two to three weeks, all we have worked on in practice is boxing out. [Coach Smith] just disciplined us so much that it was in our heads that if we don't box out, we are going to run. It is already in our minds to box out. That was a key in the game."

MT Guard Paula Penttila: "I missed all of my other three pointers, but that was the important one. I am just glad that I hit it. This was a really big win. We were focused on this game, and we had a really good game plan."

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