Blue Raiders win on record-setting night

Rodriguez becomes all-time goal leader in front of 1,309

August 25, 2006 · MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee enjoyed a record-setting night on the field and in the stands as it turned back Southern Miss, 3-1, in front of 1,309 in the first night game in school history at Blue Raider Field Friday night.

The Blue Raiders (1-0-0) increased their home win streak to 12 while setting a single-game record for attendance. Middle Tennessee senior forward Rebecca Rodriguez also got into the record-breaking action when she became the school's career leader in goals scored when she capped the scoring in the second half.

Rodriguez's goal in the 62nd minute, on an assist from Holly Grogan, was the 29th of her career, besting the mark of former teammate and current assistant Laura Miguez-Howarth.

"Laura set really high marks here so it was exciting to break that," Rodriguez said. "It's a huge relief. I told Kaley (Forrest) on the field that it was a huge weight off my shoulders. I just wish my parents could have been here. I can't do anything without my teammates because they are the reason I have been able to score these goals. It's a good way to say, 'Thank you,' to them by getting up there, doing my job, and putting one in. I wanted to show them how much I appreciate their hard work."

Freshman Mary Zapapas and senior Katy Rayburn also notched goals in the win, while Kala Morgan, andd Katie Daley were credited with assists.

The Blue Raiders debuted in resounding fashion as fans flocked to the stadium for the historic opener on a lit field. Did it make a difference?

"You bet it did," said Middle Tennessee fifth-year coach Aston Rhoden, whose teams are 30-6-1 at home. "This was an electric atmosphere and we are so appreciative of all the support. You could hear the fans cheering and getting into it and our players fed off that. If we get this type of support for all of our sports this year I think we will be awesome throughout the year."

Middle Tennessee started the scoring when Zapapas, a freshman standout, collected her first career goal in the 14th minute. Morgan initiated the score with exceptional play when she found herself in acres of space on the left wing and whipped in an inviting cross. Zapapas timed her run into the box perfectly and deftly volleyed the ball over the advancing keeper to give the Blue Raiders a 1-0 edge.

Southern Miss would tie the score 1-1 in the 31st minute when Carly Barkley won a battle and even the slate; however, it would be short-lived.

While the Middle Tennessee forwards and midfielders were impressive controlling the game, it was a defender, Rayburn, who provided what proved the game-winner. The second goal started with a free kick, again on the left wing. Kate Donnelly crossed and it was cleared by a Southern Miss defender to the edge of the box, where Daley gently knocked the ball back into the danger area. Rayburn showed her predatory instincts by smashing the ball into the bottom left corner for a 2-1 lead in the 33rd minute.

The score would remain 2-1 until Rodriguez provided breathing room in the 62nd minute. The record-setting goal was created by great work on the right wing by Grogan, who drew a defender in close, flicked the ball over her head and then sped away from her.

Grogan played an early ball into the feet of Rodriguez, who took it cleanly, cut inside the defender, and arrowed the ball into the bottom left corner, leaving the keeper grasping at air.

Middle Tennessee's patented air-tight defense didn't need much of a cushion on this night. The Blue Raiders allowed just six shots and sophomore keeper Courtney Fortner saved four of them, while allowing the one goal in her 90 minutes of action. Southern Miss managed just one shot in the second half.

The experienced trio of Sara Wohlhueter, Ingrid Christensen and Rayburn was outstanding as they provided a seemingly impassable wall along the back, while the talented midfield collection of Zapapas, Kathrine Andresen, and Daley were solid manning the middle.

Middle Tennessee returns to action Monday when it plays host to Alabama A&M at 7 p.m. It is the second of four consecutive home matches to start the 2006 campaign.

NOTES: Middle Tennessee improved to 4-6-1 in season openers and 3-2-1 in home openers ... The Blue Raiders improved to 3-2 in season openers under Rhoden and 2-0 under him in home openers ... Three Blue Raiders earned starts in their first career game, including freshmen Kate Donnelly, Kathrine Andresen, and Zapapas ... Newcomers who also saw action in their first career match, included freshmen Jennifer Threlkeld, Jeanette Heltne, Sara Beth Lee, and sophomore Kim Farrant ... The Blue Raiders earned their first win against Conference USA foe Southern Miss in four meetings.

Printed on December 13, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/20425