

Blue Raiders continue hot streak with fifth straight win

Match best start in program history

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee put its winning act on a different stage when it ventured on the road for the first time Friday; however, the script didn't change as the Blue Raiders turned back Mercer, 2-0, in the First Tennessee Classic at the University of Tennessee.

The already impressive opening to the 2006 campaign became even more striking as Middle Tennessee improved to 5-0 to match the best start in program history. The 1999 Blue Raiders also began the season 5-0. Middle Tennessee will face No. 10-ranked Tennessee Sunday at 2 p.m. (CST).

"This was a nice win for our team, especially going on the road for the first time and getting use to playing under different circumstances," Middle Tennessee coach Aston Rhoden said. "We are

playing well and showing improvement in areas as we go. These girls are playing with a lot of confidence and deservingly so. We will have our hands full with a very good Tennessee team Sunday but that's why we scheduled these games. You want to be challenged and see how your team answers the challenges. These are the matches that will best prepare us for a very tough (Sun Belt) Conference race."

Each match a new heroine emerges for the Blue Raiders and Friday's contest at Regal Soccer Stadium was no different as Kala Morgan took center stage to continue her consistent play and



outstanding start to the 2006 season. Morgan powered a pair of early goals, her third and fourth of the season, to stake Middle Tennessee to a 2-0 lead less than seven minutes into the contest.

It looked like easy sailing at that point; however, Morgan's early strikes would prove paramount as Middle Tennessee went scoreless the remainder of the match, despite a whopping 25 shots.

"We got off to a fast start with the two quick goals but we didn't finish some others after that," Morgan said. "I had some great passes on the two goals and was able to score. We had several chances but couldn't capitalize."

Middle Tennessee's airtight defense continued its cohesive play but the Mercer match was the most dominant performance from the defenders and midfielders to date. The Bears (0-5) were denied a shot in the first half and finished with just two attempts as the Blue Raiders secured their first shutout of 2006 and dropped their goals per game allowed to 0.8.

Courtney Fortner and Erynn Murray combined for the shutout with each keeper seeing 45 minutes of action.

"Both keepers played very well with (Fortner) going the first half and (Murray) going the second half and they shared in the shutout so that was good," Rhoden said. "It's nice to know we have two good keepers who can play and help this team win in any given game. The defense was solid. It was just a total team win."

The defense was so impressive it even got in on the scoring when senior Katy Rayburn teamed with Jen Threlkeld to assist Morgan's first goal, which proved to be the game-winner. Morgan finished a beautiful cross in the fourth minute for the 1-0 lead.

Morgan was at it again just moments later when she took a remarkable pass from Holly Grogan and finished from 17 yards out to give Middle Tennessee a 2-0 lead in the seventh minute.

NOTES: Middle Tennessee won its 11th consecutive regular-season match and is 12-1-2 over the last 15 regular-season matches, dating to last season ...The Blue Raiders' 5-0 start to the 2006 season matches the best in school history, equaling the 1999 squad ... Holly Grogan's assist was her third of the season, eclipsing the two she dished out all of last season. The assist also resulted in the 50th point of the junior forward's career, as she moved into a tie for fifth on the all-time points list at Middle Tennessee ... The shutout was Middle Tennessee's first of the season and 26th under fifth-year coach Aston Rhoden, whose squads have turned in 59 percent of the Blue Raiders' 44 career shutouts.

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