High-octane offense on fire against South Alabama

Nation's third-ranked scoring offense explodes for eight goals

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee soccer cheering section is known as "Aston's Army", a spin-off from head coach Aston Rhoden's name. They may start referring to the squad as "Aston's Arsenal" following another offensive outburst at Blue Raider Field Friday night.

The nation's third-ranked scoring offense was at it again as Middle Tennessee erupted for four first-half goals on its way to a resounding 8-0 win against South Alabama to run its win streak to 17 straight at Blue Raider Field and notch its 10th consecutive regular-season win against a league opponent.

South Alabama had dominated the series, winning five of the previous eight matches between the teams; however, it was the Blue Raiders turning the table in this most recent meeting as they dealt the Jaguars their worst loss in program history. The 8-0 win was the most decisive by a conference opponent against South Alabama, and it also tied the most goals allowed by one opponent in the Jaguars' history. Miami-Ohio beat South Alabama 8-0 Sept. 2, 2000.

"Totally unexpected," Rhoden said of the offensive explosion. "Of course we expected to win the game because we expect to win each time we step on the field, that's why you train and prepare; however, an 8-0 win never would have entered my mind against a team of South Alabama's caliber. It speaks volumes as to how our team is playing and the confidence with which they are playing. To our credit, the girls came out tonight and were very professional in their approach. They just took care of business."

Freshman Mary Zapapas led the assault with two goals and two assists, and junior standout Holly Grogan also scored two goals, her second straight multi-goal performance and the seventh of her career. Kala Morgan and Rebecca Rodriguez had one goal and one assist each, while Kathrine Andresen and Kim Farrant accounted for one goal each. Senior defender Katy Rayburn also factored in the scoring.

"It was nice to be back home and playing in front of our fans," said Zapapas, who has enjoyed a breakout rookie campaign with eight goals and three assists to date. "We are playing with a lot of confidence and this team has meshed well. I think that's the key to our success."

Even though Middle Tennessee's overpowering offense left little to chance, the Blue Raider defense didn't budge as it registered its second straight SBC shutout and hasn't allowed a goal in five consecutive halves of action. Middle Tennessee may have been at its best in the back Friday; however, as it did not allow a shot on goal. Keepers Erynn Murray and Courtney Fortner combined for the shutout, Middle Tennessee's fourth of the season and second in a row.

"Our goal is a shutout when we step out on the field," senior captain Sara Wohlhueter said. "Regardless of the score we don't want to let up and allow a goal. That's just not how we do it. Our offense has been doing so well on finishing and we have so much more attack this year and it's been great. Even on defending the offense has been wonderful keeping the ball in its half and that makes our job a lot easier."

The match was a stalemate for the first half of the opening stanza but when Zapapas began the scoring on a well-played pass from Rodriguez in the 20th minute she not only gave the Blue Raiders a 1-0 lead, but she also opened the floodgates.

Less than three minutes later Rodriguez sent a powerful shot from the top of the box into the far side corner, just out of the reach of a leaping Kelsie Langford. Morgan assisted and the Blue Raiders owned a 2-0 lead.

Grogan and Morgan each tallied goals within a five-minute span just before the half to send the Blue Raiders into the break with a comfortable 4-0 lead. Middle Tennessee didn't let up in the second half as Zapapas, Grogan, Andresen and Farrant scored to send the Blue Raiders to their second highest scoring output of the season.

NOTES: Mary Zapapas and Katy Rayburn were named the GoBlueRaiders.com Offensive and Defensive Players of the Game, respectively ... Middle Tennessee extended its win streak to 17 at Blue Raider Field ... The Blue Raiders won their 11th straight home game against SBC foes and have won 10 straight regular-season matches against them ... Zapapas' second assist of the match in the 83rd minute was Middle Tennessee's 37th of the season to tie for second on the single-season list. The 2004 squad had 46 helpers ... The 2006 squad already is fifth on the single-season list for goals (42) and points (121) ... The eight goals are the fifth most scored in a game in school history ... Three current Blue Raiders are ranked in the career Top 10 for points, goals, and assists ... Rebecca Rodriguez is second all-time in points with 82 and needs six more to pass Laura Miguez-Howarth for first, while Grogan is third on the list (64), and Morgan is seventh with 45 ... Rodriguez is the all-time leader in goals (31), Grogan moved into a tie for third all-time with two goals against South Alabama, giving her 26 for her career, while Morgan moved into seventh place (17) ...

Unselfishness amongst the trio is evidenced by the fact all three also are among career leaders in assists with Rodriguez in second (20), Grogan in fourth (13), and Morgan tied for fifth (11) ... Morgan moved into seventh on the single-season list for goals with her 10th of the season. She also is tied for eighth on the single-season assists list with six, and her 26 points are seventh for a single season ... Grogan's two goals give her 25 points for the season, which is seventh on the single-season list ... Zapapas' eight goals are the most by a freshman since Rodriguez scored 12 goals in 2003 ... Katy Rayburn started her 70th consecutive game. The Franklin, Tenn., native has started every game of her college career.

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