Middle Tennessee suffers 3-1 loss in SBC semifinals

Team still hopeful of at-large berth into NCAA Tournament

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LAFAYETTE, La. - Middle Tennessee's quest for its first Sun Belt Conference Tournament Championship ran into a road block in a 3-1 setback to rival North Texas in the semifinals of the league tournament here Thursday night. The Blue Raiders (17-4) led 1-0 at the half; however, North Texas scored two goals in a 3:07 span early in the second half and tacked on another in the final minute to secure the comeback win. "We knew it was going to be a tough game and it was," Middle Tennessee coach Aston Rhoden said. "You get into these tournaments and the games intensify. When you look at the Championships you have to be a good team to win, but you also have to have some luck and North Texas had the lucky breaks go their way. To their credit, they recovered from a goal down to take the lead and we just couldn't catch up. It was pretty much a 2-1 game and we were trying to find a way to get a goal late so we pushed a lot of people forward and they got the third goal but it was not a 3-1 game by any means." Middle Tennessee will now play the waiting game and await the decision of the NCAA Women's Soccer Selection Committee as to whether the team will receive an at-large berth into the NCAA Tournament following the most successful season in school history. "I certainly hope we have done enough to warrant an at-large berth," Rhoden said. "Our losses speak for themselves. We have put ourselves in a position where we know we are a competitive team and given a chance I know we can prove that at the NCAA Tournament level but

there are other teams wanting the same thing we want. We will have to wait and see." The field of 64 will be announced on ESPN News Monday between 2-to-3 p.m. Middle Tennessee controlled the first half of Thursday's game and broke a scoreless deadlock when Kala Morgan delivered her national-leading 22nd goal of the season on an assist from Rebecca Rodriguez in the 44th minute to send the Blue Raiders into the half with a 1-0 lead. North Texas (15-4-2) quickly evened the slate six minutes into the second half when Brittany Cleveland scored the first of her two goals. Kendall Juett provided what proved to be the game winner in the 55th minute. The Blue Raiders continued to attack and had several opportunities, including near misses on four second-half corner kicks, but they couldn't cash in and ultimately suffered the gut-wrenching defeat. Middle Tennessee has shattered numerous single-season records throughout the season and it has several players ranked among national leaders in several categories. Those factors could weigh in the team's favor when the Selection Committee converges this weekend.

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