Raiders Outlast FIU, 66-59

Blue Raiders extend winning streak to 21 games, claim outright Sun Belt title

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Krystle Horton scored 12 points with nine rebounds and a career-high six assists and was a big part of 17th-ranked Middle Tennessee holding off Florida International, 66-59, Thursday night at Murphy Center, the Blue Raiders 21st consecutive victory this season. Middle Tennessee (24-3, 16-0 Sun Belt) claimed the outright conference championship with the victory and becomes the first team since Louisiana Tech in 2001 to win 16 straight games to start Sun Belt play. Horton scored 10 of her 12 points in the second half. The Golden Panthers (15-10, 9-6) cut a 21-point deficit early in the second half to as little as six points at 55-49 with 6:37 to play in the game, but Chrissy Givens hit a driving layup in traffic and Starr Orr had a bucket along the baseline to extend the lead back to 10 for Middle Tennessee. FIU closed to within seven points twice more in the contest, but a Givens layup in the final minute sealed the victory. The Blue Raiders scored the first nine points of the first half on two 3-pointers from Johnna Abney and a three-point play by Amber Holt. But FIU cut the lead to 11-9 before a 20-2 run from Middle Tennessee, highlighted by another three from Abney and a pair of trifectas by Jackie Pickel for a 29-11 advantage with 10:04 left in the half. Again the Golden Panthers would cut into the lead, this time with four straight buckets from Marquita Adley to make it 31-21 Middle Tennessee with five minutes remaining in the half. The Blue Raiders took a 37-

23 advantage into intermission, with Holt, Givens and Abney all scoring nine points in the opening 20 minutes. The Blue Raiders jumped out quickly in the second half with seven straight points to build a 44-23 advantage, but FIU chipped away with contributions from Adley (8 pts), LaQuetta Ferguson (5 pts), Eva Makela (7 pts) and Lasma Jekabsone (6 pts). The Golden Panthers outscored Middle Tennessee, 26-11, over a 12-minute stretch. After Makela's jumper with 6:37 remaining in the game cut the Blue Raider lead to six points, Givens and Orr had the back-to-back buckets. Horton scored a basket and assisted on a Holt three-point play in the final minutes, as well, before the final score of the game for Middle Tennessee by Givens on a breakaway with 27 seconds left. Middle Tennessee does not play again until Thursday, February 22, at 5:15 p.m. at Troy. The Blue Raiders final home game of the season is Saturday, February 24, versus Florida Atlantic at 3 p.m. **NOTES**
SUMMER CAMP DATES SET: Middle Tennessee's women's basketball camps have been set for the upcoming summer, with the Blue Raiders host four camps at Murphy Center. The Lil' Raider Camp is set for June 11-13 and Elite Camp will be held June 29-July 1. The two team camps are June 17-19 and July 26-28. Interested parties may call Assistant Coach Alli Clark at 615/898-5356 or may obtain a brochure at http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/23728. **SUN BELT CHAMPIONSHIPS TICKETS ON SALE:** Fans may purchase ticket booklets for the Sun Belt Championships, scheduled for March 3-6 at the Cajundome in Lafayette, La., by calling the Middle Tennessee Ticket Office at 615/898-2103 or 1-888-YES-MTSU. Ticket booklets for the tournament are $84 for all eight sessions, which includes 14 total games. The ticket booklet covers both the men's and women's games. The Middle Tennessee women would begin action in the tournament on Saturday, March 3, with the semifinals on Monday, March 5 and the championship game set for Tuesday, March 6. **GAME TIME FOR FLORIDA ATLANTIC:** Middle Tennessee's final home game of the season - Saturday, February 24 versus Florida Atlantic - will start at 3 p.m. at Murphy Center. Senior Day festivities will take place before the game for four seniors - Chrissy Givens, Krystle Horton, Whitney Tate and Carden Cobb. **POSTGAME NOTES**
BLUE RAIDERS TIE RECORD: Middle Tennessee picked up its 16th Sun Belt Conference win with the victory over Florida International on Thursday. The 16 wins equals the most league victories in the history of the SBC, as Louisiana Tech registered 16 wins in 1999-00 and again in 2000-01. Due to the conference increasing the league schedule by two games this season, the Blue Raiders have a chance to set a new SBC win record. **MT SETS NEW MARK:** The Blue Raiders picked up their 24th regular season victory with the win over FIU to set a new single-season record at Middle Tennessee. The previous mark of 23 regular season wins was set by the 1982-83 squad that went on to win a school-record 26 games. **INSELL NUMBER ONE:** The win over FIU on Thursday was the 44th for Rick Insell as head coach of the Blue Raiders. That goes down as the most in school history by a coach in his first two years and breaks the previous mark of 43 victories set by Lewis Bivens from 1988-89. **HORTON SETS CAREER-HIGH IN SOLID GAME:** The one constant in an otherwise off night by the Blue Raiders on Thursday was senior Krystle Horton. The Murfreesboro native scored 12 points, collected nine rebounds, dished out a career-high six assists, and added three steals. Horton, who has 25 points in her last two games with 23 of those in the second half, is shooting a combined 72.7 percent from the field over the last three contests. **21 STRAIGHT:** The Blue Raiders ran their winning streak to a school-record 21 in a row with Thursday's win over Florida International. The current streak is the second longest nationally behind Duke (26). **30 SBC HOME WINS IN A ROW:** Middle Tennessee's home dominance of Sun Belt foes continued against Florida International, as the Blue Raiders won their 30th in a row versus league foes at Murphy Center. The last time Middle Tennessee dropped a conference home game was February 5, 2004, in double overtime against Western Kentucky. Overall, the Blue Raiders have won 34 of their last 35 home conference games and head coach Rick Insell is a perfect 19-0 at the Glass House against SBC

competition. **HORTON PASSES TWO MORE:** Senior Krystle Horton moved up two spots on the career rebounding list after ripping down nine caroms in the win over FIU. Horton jumped past Jamie Thomatis and Kay Willbanks into ninth place and stands just two shy of tying Kim Webb for eighth. Horton ran her career total to 690 rebounds. **QUICK HITTERS:** Chrissy Givens played in her 118th career game to tie for the third most in school history ... MT is now 24-0 this season when leading at halftime ... Chrissy Givens played the full 40 minutes tonight for the 11th time this season.

POSTGAME QUOTES

Middle Tennessee Coach Rick Insell

On Florida International

"They've got a very good basketball team. They're well-coached, and they came in here tonight with a plan of action. I can see why they've won six out of their last seven. They never panicked when we jumped up on them, and we did some strange things that we hadn't been doing. But now we'll get a little time off, take advantage of it, maybe flush our system out a little bit and come back ready to play Monday. We needed this type of game and we really needed to play [Florida International], because we very well may have to play them again in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. There's going to be a lot of games down the stretch like this one." **On turnovers**

"We just didn't take care of the basketball. Chrissy Givens had six turnovers, Amber Holt had three, Johnna Abney three, Krystle Horton three, Latoya Barclay three, Brandi Brown three. Everyone got into the act on turnovers, I can tell you that. We forced 28 turnovers, and that was probably the difference in the ballgame." **On struggling offensively**

"We've got to go back and do some work. We've got to do a better job executing on the offensive end. We didn't do a real good job of that. We can't go in and shoot over [players that are] 6-4 and 6-5 when we're 5-10, 5-11, and that's what we were trying to do." **On 3-point shooting**

"I was frustrated that we didn't take about 10 more. That's what I was telling Johnna [Abney] when we came in the room There were a couple of times I thought she should have pulled the trigger. We had good looks. I'm satisfied with our 3-point shooting. You'll hit one, then you'll miss four, then you'll hit six, so you've got to keep taking them." **On senior forward Krystle Horton**

"I thought Krystle was the difference in the second half. She hit 6-of-8, nine rebounds, six assists and three steals. I'm real proud of her. If she hadn't played the way she did, we would have been in a bind." **Senior forward Krystle Horton**

On contributing offensively

"Most teams are going to be keying in on Amber [Holt] and Chrissy [Givens], so at times I've got to do what I've got to do. If I see an opening, I'm going to take it." **On the importance of rebounding**

"I always go out focusing on rebounding more than anything else, because that's what Coach [Insell] has told me I need to do. That's my job and my role on the team. Rebounding usually leads to scoring, and other things happen." **On the lack of offense**

"Coach told us that we weren't executing. We've got to execute, set our screens, get our picks right, and look for the open man. That's pretty much it." **Florida International Head Coach Cindy Russo**

On what she told her team at halftime

"I knew that [Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Insell] was not happy with his team and that they would come out pressing harder and more intense. I told our team we had to play a better second half than the first half. We ended up outrebounding them and we were down 21-12 [at the half]." **On tonight's game**

"You can't win a lot of ball games without hitting the boards. If we took care of the ball a little bit better, then I think we could have won this game. You cannot turn the ball over as much as we did. I think [Middle Tennessee] played some nice defense." **On the play of sophomore forward Marquita Adley**

She had a really nice game - she was more focused. Marquita is a really nice athlete and she is very strong. She did a nice job. We got the ball to her and broke the press pretty well, but when we came down we just didn't set up an offense and run it." **On what tonight's game means to the rest of the season**

"To come here and play this team and lose by six points is not a setback. I think we could have won this game. We had our chances to win for sure, but we turned the ball over to much and I think it is something to build off where we can come and compete with anybody in the [Sun Belt] Conference."

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