Blue Raiders Advance, 3-0

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Three second-half goals broke a scoreless tie, as Middle Tennessee used another second-half surge to defeat Arkansas-Little Rock, 3-0, in the first round of the 2003 Hardee's Sun Belt Championships at the WKU Soccer Complex Wednesday afternoon. Middle Tennessee advances to the semifinals for a 7 p.m. match Thursday against the winner of the North Texas-Arkansas State match, played later Wednesday. The win is the first-ever in the conference tournament for the Blue Raiders. The match was played on a very wet, sloppy surface after overnight and early-morning downpours hit the Bowling Green area. Both teams struggled for footing in certain areas of the field and had to contend with balls skipping as well as just dying unexpectedly. Middle Tennessee controlled play for much of the match, but was unable to find the back of the net until midway through the second half. Senior Emily Carter had a chance to give the Blue Raiders a very early lead, as her shot from 15 yards hit the crossbar in the fourth minute of the match. UALR came right back on the counterattack, with Laura Cook and Dee Dee Beyhan up the field against only one Blue Raider defender, Katy Rayburn. Cook crossed and Beyhan's chip past Middle Tennessee keeper Danielle Perreault went wide left. The Trojans had another chance a couple of minutes later, as Beyhan crossed deep into the box in front of the keeper, but Cook's head attempt was unfruitful, with the ball sliding all the way across the field and out of the box. The Blue Raiders then turned up the pressure for the final 35 minutes of the half, peppering UALR keeper Marsha Stewart with a dozen shots in the period, forcing the sophomore to make four saves. A throw-in late in the half found the head of Carter, who flicked it towards the net before Christina Mascaro came crashing in from the weakside, only to have her shot saved. A cross from Mascaro had Carter and Rachel Holmes both barreling toward the net, but Stewart got a hand on it before either could reach the floater. The Blue Raiders continued to pressure after halftime, with a Laura Miguez floater hitting the crossbar just five minutes into the second half. All of the hard work finally paid off in the 61st minute when a corner kick by Holmes floated near the top of the box and Claire Ward's low shot was deflected by Stewart but crossed the goal line for a 1-0 Middle Tennessee lead. The Blue Raiders kept up the pressure and Miguez finally was rewarded for her hard work during the match, taking a

cross from Jenny Cox, beating two defenders and then Stewart low and left in the 65th minute for a 2-0 advantage. But UALR would not go away, and an apparent hook-up between Beyhan and Cook in the 73rd minute was nullified by an offsides call. A direct kick by Jennifer Heinrichs in the 82nd minute was saved by Perreault, another scoring opportunity for the Trojans in the second half. After a corner a minute later, a shot in the box from Heinrichs was cleared off the back post by Sarah Linder, and the Blue Raiders countered down the field for the final score of the match. A long ball was cleared to Danielle LaDuke, who beat Stewart, as the keeper was well out of the goal. LaDuke took two more touches before firing past Elena Esquibel for her second goal of the season and second in the last two matches. The Blue Raiders outshot UALR, 24-5, with Perreault making just one save. Stewart finished with 10 saves in the match. "This was a good win for us. We really had to work a little harder than we wanted to, but we did some good things and played much smarter in the second half," Blue Raider head coach Aston Rhoden said. "Now we have to get some rest and prepare for another tough match against whomever we play." **MATCH NOTES**

Freshman Rebecca Rodriguez made just her seventh start of the season and the first since October 10, also against Arkansas-Little Rock ... The Blue Raiders and Trojans met for the ninth time and first in the SBC Championships, with Middle Tennessee improving to 7-2 ... Claire Ward's goal was her third of the season and the first since October 19 against North Texas ... Laura Miguez's score set several milestones, tying the junior for the career goals record with teammate Emily Carter. Miguez now has 31 points this season, moving her past Hailee Walsh into first place on the single-season points list ... Freshman Rachel Holmes was credited with an assist on Ward's score, the sixth assist of the season for Holmes, moving her into a tie for fourth on the single-season list.

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