Horton's 25 Paces Lady Raiders to Win

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Freshman Krystle Horton's 25 points paced Middle Tennessee (15-6, 5-3 SBC) to a 73-47 win over Florida International (11-11, 5-4) Saturday in the Murphy Center.

The game never seemed to be in doubt even though the Golden Panthers cut the lead to single digits in both halves. Middle Tennessee opened the first half on an 8-0 run and held FIU scoreless for the first four minutes of the game. The Golden Panthers scored its first point in the contest when Milena Tomova hit 1-of-2 free throws to make the score 8-1.

Middle Tennessee pushed the lead to 10 (20-10) with 10:57 to go when both teams seemed to hit a wall. Neither team scored for the next four minutes until Lady Raider Patrice Holmes knocked down a jumper off an assist by Jennifer Justice to make the score 22-10. In the final six minutes both squads traded baskets, and FIU pulled within four (22-18) before the Lady Raiders 8-0 streak and led 32-21 going into the locker room.

FIU opened the second half on a 7-0 run to pull within four (32-28) before Patrice Holmes scored on a jumper at the 17:16 mark. Middle Tennessee pulled ahead off a 13-4 run to lead by 15 (47-32) with 12:33 left to go in the game. The Lady Raider lead was never jeopardized again.

Middle Tennessee shot 52.6 percent from the field and was 12-of-13 from the free throw line for 92.3 percent. FIU shot 33.3 from the field and 11-13 from the free throw line. The Lady Raiders also out rebounded FIU by nine, 35-26.

Horton's 25 points led all scorers in the contest and she scored 16 of her points in the first half.

Overall, Horton shot 12-of-17 from the field, pulled down seven rebounds and had two assists.

Holmes added six points and also had eight assists in the game, which was one shy of her season-high. Senior Keisha McClinic added two more steals to her total and now has 79 on the season, which leads the nation.

Middle Tennessee completes its three-game home stand on Thursday when the Lady Raiders host North Texas. Tip-off is set for 7 p.m. in the Murphy Center.

NOTES:

HORTON HAS BIG GAME: Freshman Krystle Horton turned in her best scoring effort against Sun Belt competition by pouring in a game-high 25 points on 12 of 17 shooting. The 12 field goals matched her career-best set earlier this season against Norfolk State when she finished with 29 points. The Murfreesboro, native also added seven rebounds and two assists.

PLAYER OF THE GAME: Members of the media voted freshman Krystle Horton as the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game. Horton had a game-high 25 points to go with seven rebounds.

GIVENS SOLID OFF BENCH: Freshman Chrissy Givens came off the bench and enjoyed the second highest scoring game of her career by notching nine points on 4-for-5 shooting. The Monroe, La., native also equaled her personal-best with four rebounds in 21 minutes.

SHE LOVES FEBRUARY: Middle Tennessee Head Coach Stephany Smith seems to do some of her best work during the month of February. During her tenure as head coach, the Lady Raiders are a combined 36-11 (.766) in the month of February, including a perfect 10-0 record in 1999. Even more impressive is Smith's mark over the past five years, which stands at 25-6 (.806).

TEAM BALL: Middle Tennessee did a great job of communicating and keeping everybody involved in the win over FIU. The Lady Raiders hit a total of 30 field goals and 25 of those were accompanied by an assist, which works out to 83.3 percent. MT's starters accounted for 21 of the assists.

GOOD SHOOTING DAY: The key to Middle Tennessee's win over FIU on Saturday was its ability to make shots. The Lady Raiders shot 52.6 percent from the field, which was their best shooting game since making 52.7 percent of their shots in a win over Chicago State on Dec. 17. For the year, Middle Tennessee has shot 50 percent or better from the field seven times and are 6-1 in those contests.

TIDBITS: Yamil Cordero and Jenne Webb saw action for the first time since the South Carolina State contest on Dec. 22 ... The 26-point margin of victory against FIU on Saturday went down as the largest in the seven-game series ... Middle Tennessee is now 13-1 when leading at the half ... Keisha McClinic has made 13 of her last 15 free throws ... Against FIU, Middle Tennessee failed to put at least two players in double figures for the first time since losing to No. 10 ranked Georgia on Dec. 13 ... The win over FIU was the 120th coaching victory for Stephany Smith.

NEXT UP: The Lady Raiders will host North Texas on Feb. 12. Tipoff is scheduled for 7 PM.

QUOTES:

Head Coach Stephany Smith:

"We came out tenacious defensively and that was just a great statement for our team. The reason this team can be special is because of its ability to defend. If we continue to defend then I think we can make a lot of noise. Today was a really good night on the defensive end of the floor."

"I thought we bodied her [Milena Tomova] up a lot. Did a really good job fronting her in the low posts and always had help side and they really couldn't get her any looks. We Put a lot of pressure on the ball which of course led to all the turnovers they had in their back court as well as kept Tomova from getting involved in the action."

"We were a little more aggressive in our offense in the second half."

MT Guard Patrice Holmes:

"Krystle [Horton] gets open because she is focused on getting the ball in the basket more. She posted up well and we just have to find a way to get the ball to her and she will score. This win is a big confidence booster for us. I think we put a lot of pressure on them to make them turn the ball over."

MT Forward Krystle Horton

"We did great on defense which was our goal. On offense they went to a zone and we were looking for the open players. We are an unselfish team and looking for the open player."

"This was a very important game because of the let down against Western Kentucky. We knew we had to come out and play a good game to keep up our confidence."

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