Lady Raiders Grab Share of First Place with Win over ASU

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's (18-6, 8-3 Sun Belt) 70-47 win over Arkansas State (17-6, 8-3 Sun Belt) Thursday in the Murphy Center puts the Lady Raiders in a three-way tie for first place in the Sun Belt East.

Arkansas State jumped out first in the game off an Ali Carter three-pointer and the Lady Raiders trailed by as much as three to start the game before Middle Tennessee tied the game 7-7. Sophomore Tia Stovall's jumper with 12:59 left in the first half gave the Lady Raiders their first lead in the game, 9-7 and ASU tied it again off a lay-up by Catriece Webster and pulled ahead 11-9 when Adrianne Davie hit a jumper.

In the final 10 minutes of the first half, Middle Tennessee went on a 23-11 run to push the lead to 12, 34-22, at the break. Junior Patrice Holmes gave the Lady Raiders the lead and began the run when she hit a jumper and was fouled, as Middle Tennessee never trailed again.

Second half action was all Middle Tennessee as the Lady Raiders proved they refused to lose twice against Arkansas State. The Lady Raiders pushed their lead to 17 in the first three minutes of the game when the Lady Raider went on a 9-2 run. Middle Tennessee's largest lead of the night was 26 points, 54-28, when Cartia Bailey hit a jumper at the 11:39 minute mark.

Head Coach Stephany Smith cleared the bench in the game as every Lady Raider saw action. Only senior guard Yamil Cordero failed to get in the scoring column.

Middle Tennessee shot 53.1 percent from the field, hitting 26-of-49 from the field and held Arkansas State to a frosty 27.1 percent. The Lady Raiders lost the rebounding advantage by one, 33-32, but had 14 steals in the game.

Krystle Horton led all scorers with 14 points and also had six rebounds. Keisha McClinic and Stovall each had 13 points and Mclinic also grabbed team-high seven rebounds and snatched two steals.

Middle Tennessee held Arkansas State's Ali Carter to just seven points as she only hit two field goals in the game. Freshman Rudy Sims got into foul trouble and was never a real factor in the game and ended the contest scoreless.

Saturday is senior day, as the Lady Raiders will honor McClinic, Cordero and Jennifer Justice prior to their match-up with Arkansas-Little Rock. Tip-off is set for 2 p.m.

NOTES:

LADY RAIDERS GET REVENGE WITH DEFENSE: Middle Tennessee took command of the East Division on Thursday night by defeating Arkansas State, 70-47. The convincing win was keyed by some tough Lady Raider defense. MT held the Lady Indians to just 27.1 percent shooting from the field and forced 22 ASU turnovers. It marked the lowest percentage the Lady Raiders have held an opponent to this season and the lowest since making UALR connect on only 23.9 percent of its shots on Jan. 11, 2003.

PLAYER OF THE GAME: Members of the media voted Keisha McClinic as the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game. McClinic scored 13 points, ripped down seven boards and collected two steals.

LADY RAIDERS PICK UP NO. 18: Thursday nights win over Arkansas State marked the 18th of the year for Middle Tennessee, which goes down as the most regular season victories for the Lady Raiders in the Stephany Smith era.

STOVALL CONTINUES TO SHINE: Sophomore Tia Stovall continued her strong play in the win over Arkansas State. Stovall netted 13 points on 6 of 8 shooting, collected five rebounds and five assists (equaled career-best) to go along with three steals in only 28 minutes. Over her last three games, Stovall is averaging 17.0 points, 5.7 rebounds, 3.7 assists, 3.0 steals, and is shooting 65.5 percent from the field (19-29).

TIDBITS: After the Lady Raiders lost their first two conference games of the year, they have bounced back to go 8-1 in league play ... The Lady Raiders are now 15-1 when leading at intermission ... MT is a perfect 3-0 since Tia Stovall made it back into the starting lineup ... Cartia Bailey's five points marked her most in a game since putting in five at Tennessee State on Dec. 15 ... Chrissy Givens matched her career-best with three steals ... Stephany Smith is now 39-11 (.780) during her career in the month of February.

NEXT UP: The Lady Raiders will host Arkansas-Little Rock on Saturday at 2 PM.

QUOTES:

MT Head Coach Stephany Smith: "We have been looking forward to this basketball game for a

mighty long time. I was concerned that we would be a little anxious coming out of the gates, and we were. We turned the ball over I think 12 times in the first half. It is the month of February, and I think we are playing better as a team. People have stepped up and replaced Ciara Gray's absence pretty smoothly. That is a testament to how this team practices and plays everyday."

"Nobody was stopping Tia but Tia. We are fortunate that we have had the depth that we have had at the time that we had it. The only thing that gave Tia the recognition that she was not doing what she needed to do was the bench. Sometimes, that is the only way people learn. She did learn, and she has been extremely effective, even before. That is our best front line. There is no question that Tia and Krystle are our best front line. Nobody on this team, or anybody in the league, would argue that point. She was already playing well and doing what I wanted her to do, which was take care of the basketball."

MT Guard Keisha McClinic: "We just wanted to be aggressive. A lot of times we have been passive. One of our biggest things in defense is getting transition points. That is what we wanted to do, and we were able to do that."

"Patrice gets to the hole better than anyone in our conference. When she gets to the hole and drives and kicks, she brings our team to another level. That is what we have been able to do lately."

MT Forward Tia Stovall: On Ciara Gray's absence "I just knew I had to get more focused. Like Coach Smith said, I needed to quit turning the ball over. I think mentally it prepared me more."

"From the jump, we were aggressive and intense. Like any team, when someone jumps at you like that and keep cramming it down your throat, you are going to back off. I think that is what we did to them."

ASU Head Coach Brian Boyer: "There is usually a reason that you don't shoot the ball well. It comes down to the fact that we had very few open looks. There are teams this time of the year that are trying to make the step to postseason. Middle Tennessee is a team that is ready right now. They dominated us in all areas of the game. One of those was on the defensive end where we just couldn't get open looks."

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