Middle Tennessee Sweeps SBC Indoor Meet - Again

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's tracks teams are still doing the Sun Belt Conference sweep.

The Blue Raiders and Lady Raiders continued their stronghold on the Sun Belt Conference Indoor Track and Field Championships by holding off stern competition at Murphy Center Saturday and Sunday, and they did it in record-setting fashion, extending their own record of consecutive titles. Mardy Scales also made history by breaking a championship meet record in the 200-meter.

Scales was named the Most Outstanding Track Performer for his efforts. He scored 20 points in the meet.

Each team won its fourth SBC Indoor championship in as many years since joining the league in 2000-01. The Lady Raiders' fourth consecutive SBC title was the program's ninth conference championship overall. Middle Tennessee held off a determined North Texas squad, using the spints and hurdles to overcome the competition after entering Sunday's final round in fifth place.

The Lady Raiders won with 124 points, followed by North Texas (99.5) and South Alabama (87).

"We know we are the favorites to win the championships and we just come out here and do what we have to do, work hard and focus," said Lady Raider Kishara George, who won the 400 with a personal best 54.26.

Middle Tennessee's men also won their fourth consecutive SBC title and the program's 13th Indoor championship overall. The Blue Raiders have actually won five straight conference championships dating back to the 2000 season when they won the Ohio Valley Conference Indoor crown.

The Blue Raiders also won with 124 points, holding off Louisiana-Lafayette (112) and Western Kentucky (97).

Veteran Blue Raider coach Dean Hayes was named Coach of the Year for the 20th time in his career when he was tabbed women's Indoor Track and Field Coach of the Year.

"I will have to quit or retire before we lose one," Hayes joked. "It's really great (to win again), and it shows the consistency of the program and the athletes we have. They pass the torch on from one year to the other."

Scales established a new meet championship record in the 200 to begin Middle Tennessee's all-out assault in the sprints. Scales, a native of nearby Franklin, Tenn., ran a 20.84 to win the 200, and he was one of four Blue Raiders to earn points in the event. Scales was followed by Xavier Darden (21.69), who finished third; Wesley Dupar-Scott was fifth (21.71), and Pedro Holiday was seventh (21.80).

"My goal was to set the meet record," Scales said. "This was my last time competing in a conference indoor meet so I wanted to go out with a bang. I was proud of our team. It was important for us to win the Sun Belt Indoor title again, and we pulled together to make it happen."

The Blue Raiders entered Sunday's final round in fourth place, but they also had several performers qualified in the sprints, which is the team's bread-and-butter.

"We mainly focus on the sprints," said Blue Raider Sean Waller, who won the men's 400 with a personal-best 47.25. "We load up in the sprints and today it seemed like we did pretty good. That's our focus so we can't wait to get to the sprints." It was in the aforementioned 200-meter dash that Middle Tennessee started making up ground. With four runners earning points, Middle Tennessee took the lead and needed only to finish fifth or higher in the 1600-meter relay to win the championship. The Blue Raider relay team of Darden, Scales, Tim Hicks and Waller assured the title by winning the relay going away.

The Blue Raiders also racked up in the 55-meter with four players placing. Scales defended his 55-meter championship with a time of 6.34, finishing ahead of Holiday (6.41), who was second. Darden (6.45) was fourth and Dupar-Scott finished eighth (6.52).

"We expected to kick it up a notch in conference," said Holiday, who is a receiver on the Blue Raider football team. "You never know who is going to win because we can go one through four. We are pretty deep on the depth chart in sprints."

The Blue Raiders also had three runners place in the 400, which was won by Waller. Tim Hicks was fifth and Victor Okorie was eighth. Garland Martin's 7.39 was good for second in the 55-meter hurdles, while Linnie Yarbrough (7.42) was fourth.

Greg Jones finished third in the men's triple jump, while James Thomas was second in the weight throw with a personal best 51-05.5. Willie Parker was seventh in the weight throw.

The Lady Raiders also had tremendous success in the sprints to storm from behind and capture the championship banner. In addition to George winning the 400-meter, Rosemary Okafor and Candace Robertson were individual champs in the 55-meter and 55-hurdles, respectively, and every Lady Raider who qualified for Sunday's finals scored points.

"I just felt I had to step up because I want us to win conference so I had to give it my all," said

Robertson, who ran a 8.22. "I felt a lot of pressure because North Texas is making a push, but I had to do it. This is where we come out, at conference."

Okafor also picked up a second in the 200-meter (24.09) and was on the Lady Raiders' winning 1600-meter relay. George (24.20) was third in the 200, while Nicole Marcus finished fifth (24.91). A trio of Lady Raiders also picked up points in the 55-meter, led by Okafor's winning time of 6.93. Marcus was fourth (7.19), and Tiffany Owens finished fifth (7.23).

Jessica Anderson was fourth in the 55 hurdles with a time of 8.30. Kerry Barrow (56.84) was sixth in the 400, while Contrena Brown was seventh (57.29). The Lady Raiders started the day by earning points in the triple jump as Letitia Eady was second (41-01.5), followed by Rolanda Howard's 38-09.7, which was good for sixth. Middle Tennessee also placed two in the women's weight throw with Meaghan Byrd finishing second (50-10.0), and Katie Mirgliotta fourth, 47-09.25.

The Lady Raider 1600 relay team of Barrow, Brown, George and Okafor finished first.

WOMEN'S STANDINGS
1 Middle Tennessee 124
2 North Texas 99.5
3 South Alabama 87
4 Florida International 84
5 Western Kentucky 81
6 New Mexico State 54.5
7 Louisiana-Lafayette 38
8 Arkansas State 29
9 New Orleans 16
10 Arkansas-Little Rock 11

MEN'S STANDINGS
1 Middle Tennessee 124
2 Louisiana-Lafayette 112
3 Western Kentucky 97
4 South Alabama 70
5 North Texas 61
6 Arkansas-Little Rock 60
7 Arkansas State 45
8 New Orleans 30
9 Florida International 24

QUOTE SHEET FROM SUNDAY'S FINALS

WOMEN'S 3000
Jessica Schmidt, North Texas
"The whole team was all around and supportive and it was nice to have the support. Everyone was into the race and that helped. I just feel we have a good all around team and talented individuals so if we all come together then every event we win helps."

MEN'S 3000
David Altmaier, Western Kentucky

"I guess it was the best case scenerio for me. I knew either myself or some of my teammates had a chance to win it. The strategy before the race was to go out and give ourselves a chance and that's what we did and we all were there at the end. That last lap was just going hard and it worked out all right."

WOMEN'S DISTANCE MEDLEY
Ribiche Mankatu, South Alabama, anchor
"We were ready and wanted to win. It was important to get our team some points and we were able to do that. I had the baton on the end, and I knew I had to bring it on that last lap."

WOMEN'S WEIGHT THROW
AngieGardner, Western Kentucky
"It's what I wanted to do. There's always a chance that everybody will perform better so you have to come out and do what you know you can do. I just had to step up and get in a good throw."

MEN'S WEIGHT THROW
Raigo Toompuu, Western Kentucky
"I didn't expect 55 feet, but it's a good distance for me. I was expecting maybe 51, 52, just enough to win."

WOMEN'S TRIPLE JUMP
Linda Loussaint, Florida International
"Taught me a lot about how any given jump, any given day, anything can happen. I was hoping to win, anything can happen. I had a good mindset."

MENS TRIPLE JUMP
Lawrence Willis, Louisiana-Lafayette
"It was important to start the day off good in the field events. We wanted to build on the lead we had going into (Sunday). I'm satisfied, but I didn't have my full approach in the runway and didn't do as well as I think I could have, but I did well."

WOMEN'S MILE
Nicole Jaggers, Western Kentucky
"I wasn't expecting to win, but I felt good about the race. It wasn't my best time, but it was good enough (5:07.16). We knew we had to score high in the distance to have a chance to win."

MEN'S 400
Sean Waller, Middle Tennessee
"We mainly focus on the sprints. We load up in the sprints and today it seemed like we did pretty good. That's our focus so we can't wait to get to the sprints. I was just trying to stay relaxed. When I came out of the blocks I saw that I had caught two people real quick so my legs stayed with me."

MEN'S MILE
Phillip Lagat, South Alabama
"I feel very great because it was my first time winning a championship. It was not easy but toward the final I had my teammates helping me and pushing me."

WOMEN'S 400
Kishara George, Middle Tennessee

"I really felt good about how I did today. I have been training hard since the start of the season, and I'm just glad it all paid off. This was my best for Indoors . I am just happy about it and thankful to coach for being there for me. "We know we are the favorites to win the championships and we just come out here and do what we have to do, work hard and focus."

WOMEN'S 55 DASH
Rosemary Okafor, Middle Tennessee
"We had the confidence we were going to win. I was pleased with my performances for the most part. We believe and when you believe in your coach and your efforts, it's hard to lose."

MEN'S 55 DASH
Mardy Scales, Middle Tennessee
"I felt my performance was really good, but something had to be wrong with the timing system because I know I didn't run a 34. I've never run that slow before."

WOMEN'S 55 HURDLES
Candice Robertson, Middle Tennessee
"I just felt I had to step up because I want us to win conference so I had to give it my all. I felt a lot of pressure because North Texas is making a push, but I had to do it. This is where we come out, at conference."

WOMEN'S 800
Ribiche Mankatu, South Alabama
"I believe I ran well. I was pleased with the place. I'm happy for me and for the team. Everybody is working to do as much as we can for the program. I did absolutely fine. I had a bad start in the 200 and wanted to come back and do well. This was my first Indoor meet so I'm feeling good right now."

MEN'S 200
Mardy Scales, Middle Tennessee
(ON ESTABLISHING NEW CHAMPIONSHIP MEET RECORD WITH 20.84 IN THE 200)
"I was shooting for it, my last year in the 200 here. I wanted to go out on a strong note. I was feeling pretty confident."

WOMEN'S 5000
Jessica Schmidt, North Texas
"I am very pleased. I ran it for the team. Point-wise we thought we were second and we needed the points. We didn't do it, but I'm glad I ran. I love the 5000."

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