Lady Raiders Earn Share of Sun Belt East Championship

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MIAMI, Fla. - Middle Tennessee women's basketball (20-7, 10-4 Sun Belt) earned a share of the Sun Belt Conference Eastern Division Championship with a 63-48 win over Florida International (11-16, 5-9 Sun Belt) Monday in Golden Panther Arena.

It was a game of firsts for Middle Tennessee as the Lady Raider win was the first victory in Golden Panther Arena. The 10 wins in the Sun Belt is also the most wins since joining the Sun Belt and it is the first Sun Belt Championship for the Lady Raiders. The 20 wins is the first 20 win season for the Lady Raiders since 1995-96.

It was a nip and tuck game in the first half as the Lady Raiders shared buckets and the lead with Florida International in the first 20 minutes. Middle Tennessee went into the locker room with a four-point lead 34-30.

"We did a good job early in the game getting good looks inside," said head coach Stephany Smith. "Toward the end of the first half they switched to a zone and caused us some problems but we came out and adjusted some in the second half."

The second half began with a commanding performance by Middle Tennessee. In the first 11 minutes the Lady Raiders went on a 17-7 run to push the lead in Middle Tennessee's favor.

Middle Tennessee then found them selves in a scoring slump as the Lady Raiders went on a six-minute stretch without scoring. Luckily, FIU couldn't find the bucket either as the Golden Panthers only scored four points in that span.

Junior Patrice Holmes broke Middle Tennessee's scoring drought when she hit a driving lay-up with 5:15 left to play in the game. The Lady Raiders then went on another mini drought until Holmes

answered again with a bucket with 2:27 remaining. The Lady Raiders went on an 8-5 run in the final two minutes of the game to seal the win.

Senior Keisha McClinic also garnered a personal accolade against FIU as her two steals in the game gave her 94 on the season, breaking the single season record. She snaps the record set by teammate Holmes last season.

"If somebody deserves to break a record on this team it is Keisha McClinic," Smith said. "She has given 110 percent of herself to this basketball team and has had so many clutch plays to help us to this night."

Freshman Krystle Horton and Holmes each had 16 points to lead the Lady Raiders. The only other double figure scorer for Middle Tennessee was Tia Stovall as she had 13 in the game.

Middle Tennessee is the No. 4 seed heading into the Sun Belt Tournament. The Lady Raiders will face No. 5 seed North Texas on Sunday at 11 a.m. in Bowling Green, Ky.

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