Lady Raiders Use First Half Explosion to Advance in Sun Belt Tourney

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee (21-7), the No. 4 seed, used a 27-point first half lead to control North Texas and picked up a Sun Belt Tournament quarter-final win 81-66 Sunday over No. 5 seed North Texas (11-17).

In the first nine minutes of the game, the Lady Raiders held North Texas to just five points as the Lady Raiders put together a 20-point effort. In the final 11 minutes of the game, Middle Tennessee ran off another 22 points, only allowing North Texas 10 to lead 43-15 at the half. The 15-point output by North Texas in the first half was the lowest Middle Tennessee has allowed this season.

North Texas attempted a rally in the second half and outscored the Lady Raiders by 12 points (51-39) but the huge lead in the first half proved to be just enough cushion for Middle Tennessee. After shooting only 26.9 percent in the first half, North Texas shot a scorching 57.1 percent in the second half to attempt a comeback.

Patrice Holmes scored a game-high 22 points and also had three assists and three steals. Freshman Chrissy Givens had a coming out party as she scored a career-high 18 points, with 11 coming in the second half, and was 4-of-5 from the free throw line.

The dynamic duo of Tia Stovall and Krystle Horton also scored in double figures as they had 14 and 12 points respectively. Senior Keisha McClinic continued to add to her steals total as she snagged five against North Texas and has 99 on the season.

Middle Tennessee will compete in the semi-finals Monday at 11 a.m. against Denver. The Lady Raiders defeated the Lady Pioneers 68-56 earlier in the year.

NOTES:

GIVENS SCORES BIG: Freshman Chrissy Givens scored a career-high 18 points against North Texas. It was the third time she has scored in double figures this season.

HOLMES LOVES THE TOURNEY: When it's tourney time is when Patrice Holmes shines as she led all scorers against North Texas with 22 points. In her last four tournament appearances, dating back to last season, Holmes has scored 20 or more points in three of the four games.

IT SHOULD BE A CRIME: Keisha McClinic's five steals against North Texas gives her 99 for the season and 233 for her career. It is also the most steals she has had in a tournament game.

IN THE OPENING ROUND: Middle Tennessee is now 3-0 in the opening round of the Sun Belt Tournament.

THE LAST TIME WE SAW THEM IN THE TOURNEY: The Lady Raiders lost to Denver 78-63 in the teams last meeting at the 2002 Sun Belt Tournament. Overall, the Lady Raiders are 2-3 against Denver but have won the last two meetings.

TIDBITS: The Lady Raiders shot 50 percent or better from the field for the 12th time this season ... The Lady Raiders will be on TV for the second time this season when they face Denver on Monday ... Freshman Krystle Horton has now scored in double figures in nine consecutive games ... The 15-point output by North Texas in the first half was the lowest Middle Tennessee has allowed this season.

TICKET INFO: BLUE RAIDER FANS WISHING TO PURCHASE TICKETS FOR TOMORROW'S SUN BELT CONFERENCE WOMEN'S SEMIFINAL GAME BETWEEN MIDDLE TENNESSEE AND DENVER CAN PICK THEM UP AT THE TEAM HOTEL IN BOWLING GREEN OR BY CALLING 615-631-9511. WHEN PURCHASING THROUGH MIDDLE TENNESSEE, THE TICKET PRICE IS $15 WHICH INCLUDES BOTH GAMES OF THE MORNING SESSION.

THE TEAM HEADQUARTERS IS THE HAMPTON INN (270-842-4100), WHICH IS OFF OF EXIT 22 IN BOWLING GREEN. THE CONTACT FOR TICKET PURCHASES IS DIANE TURNHAM.

QUOTES:

Head Coach Stephany Smith:

"For 20 minutes that was a whole lot of fun. It was a tale of two halves for Sure. North Texas was a lot more aggressive in the second half and we were a lot more passive."

"We are far from our potential. We have had a lot of 20-minute games, and you saw one of them."

MT Guard Keisha McClinic (on her 99 steals):

"I just try to anticipated the pass, think ahead and be there."

NT Head Coach Tina Slinker:

"We're certainly pleased with the second half performance. And to be in that situation, especially with a young team, and not give up, I was really pleased with that.

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