

Late first-half flurry, strong defense keys 3-1 soccer win

Blue Raiders turn back UALR

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee used a late offensive flurry in the first half and steady defensive play to make a move in the tightly-contested Sun Belt

Conference race with a 3-1 win against UALR at Blue Raider Field Friday night. The Blue Raiders (6-5-2, 3-2-0) scored three goals in a six-minute span late in the first half, highlighted by two goals from freshman Kelly Downs and another from freshman defender Fran Howells, and the Blue Raider defense made it stand in a pivotal league win.

"It's a huge win for us because UALR is such an improved team and it shows in their record overall and in the league," Middle Tennessee coach Aston Rhoden said.

"We played a tough opponent tonight and we were fortunate to get some goals there late in the first half." While the offense was opportunistic, the

defense maintained a solid presence after allowing the first goal of the match in the 26th minute.

Freshman keeper Kela Casiple notched her fourth win in goal and defenders Howells, Emily Snowdon, Ingrid Christensen, and Bethany Bertovic were strong in the back. Another key to the match was the midfield play of Kaley Forrest, Vanessa Mueggler, and Katherine Andresen. The trio was consistent in the middle and helped the Blue Raiders control play. The Blue Raiders limited UALR to five shots in the match and just two in the second half. UALR (8-6, 3-2) jumped out to a 1-0 lead on Dana Sahd's goal in the 26th minute but that score appeared to provide the wake-up call the Blue Raiders needed. Following UALR's goal, Middle Tennessee erupted for three goals in a six-minute span to take a 3-1 advantage into the half. The Blue Raiders scored their first goal when



Downs took a rebound off of a goal kick and powered it into the back of the net to even the score, 1-1, in the 36th minute. Howells' first career goal off a free kick from 40 yards out proved to be the match winner and provided Middle Tennessee a 2-1 lead in the 39th minute but the Blue Raiders were not finished. Downs scored her second goal of the half off an assist from Jen Threlkeld in the 42nd minute to conclude a flurry of late activity and send the Blue Raiders into the half with momentum and a 3-1 lead. The Blue Raiders maintained possession and controlled the attack for the majority of the second half and UALR was never able to get on the board to make a serious run at Middle Tennessee in the second half. Middle Tennessee won its 11th straight match against the Lady Trojans and improved to 11-2 all-time against UALR including a 7-0 mark under Rhoden.

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