Holt's 28 Not Enough at UT

Blue Raiders cut lead to five only to watch No. 1 Lady Vols pull away

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee trailed by just five points with seven minutes to play, but top-ranked Tennessee pulled away at the end thanks to 17 free throws, defeating the Blue Raiders, 84-61, Thursday night at Thompson-Boling Arena. Amber Holt led the Blue Raiders with 28 points, hitting 8-of-16 from the field and 10-of-11 at the foul line. Starr Orr added a season-high 12 points on four 3-pointers and Johnna Abney had 11 points, including three of the Blue Raiders 11 trifectas. Holt added five assists for the Blue Raiders. The Lady Vols increased the lead to as many as 14 points, but the Blue Raiders would not go away, knocking down four straight 3-pointers, two each from Holt and Abney, cutting the deficit to 58-53 and forcing a UT timeout with 7:57 remaining. Tennessee then hit the foul line over the final seven minutes, making 17 free throws during the stretch, as Middle Tennessee was called for 11 fouls. A total of 51 fouls were called in the contest on both teams. Holt scored 20 of the team's 31 points in the second half, taking over at one points and netting nine straight and 12 of 15. The Blue Raiders started the game hot as a firecracker, hitting their first four 3-pointers of the game, three from Starr Orr, and led 10-4 in the early-going and 14-6 at the first media timeout. But the Lady Vols went on a 12-0 run over the next six minutes to take the lead for good. Tennessee spent the final 10 minutes of the half at the foul line, making 11-of-15 in the half and scoring 10 free throws and just five field goals in that span. The Blue Raiders had three good chances in the final two minutes to cut into the UT lead, and Holt's

driving layup with 5.2 seconds remaining cut the deficit to 39-30 at the break. Middle Tennessee scored seven of the first nine points of the second half, two free throws from Holt followed by a Johnna Abney 3-pointer and then and up-and-under layup from Holt, cutting the UT lead to 41-37. But Parker had a layup and then a 3-pointer and Angie Bjorklund had another 3-pointer in transition, prompting a timeout by the Blue Raiders. "Our team really battled. We cut it to five and [Candace] Parker just took over," head coach Rick Insell said. "It's just one of those things, but our kids hung in there and knocked down some shots. We had some good looks early and didn't knock 'em down, but we started to do that later in the second half and it got us back in the game." Middle Tennessee next plays Saturday at Austin Peay at 5:15 p.m. The Blue Raiders return home on December 19, facing Florida International in the Sun Belt opener at 7 p.m. **POSTGAME NOTES**

Freshman Emily Queen drew the first start of her career. The Blue Raiders used the fifth different starting lineup this season in eight games ... Starr Orr hit four 3-pointers in the first half and had a season-high 12 points in the first 20 minutes. The four trifectas was a career-high. Orr had never made more than two 3-pointers in a game in her Blue Raider career ... Middle Tennessee was 10-of-13 at the foul line in the contest for a season-high .769 percentage at the foul line. The Blue Raiders made a season-low 20 field goals and had a season-low 55 attempts as well against the Lady Vols. UT had season-high for a Middle Tennessee opponent with 28 free throws made and 37 attempts ... Junior Johnna Abney had six 3-point attempts in the game, bringing her career total to 336. She passed Keisha McClinic (332, 2001-04) and Paula Penttila (332, 2000-03) and moved into eighth place on the career list. **Middle Tennessee Head Coach Rick Insell**

On his team's performance

"Our young ladies played hard. I'm proud of them. They didn't quit or give up. Tennessee's got the best team in the country. What can you say? They played hard and I'm just really, really proud of our players at Middle Tennessee." **On how close the game was late**

"Honestly, I was not surprised that (the lead was) six points (with seven minutes left). I thought we had some good looks early and didn't knock those shots down and then we did knock shots down and got back in the game. That's when (Candace) Parker took over. She's a great player and got the job done. (Nicky) Anosike went to the boards and it was kind of tough trying to control the both of them. They did what they had to do and that's why they are a championship team." **On Amber Holt's play**

"We're a young team and we're going to get better. Amber (Holt) has to have more trust in the team and that's something we worked on tonight. She has to trust them and then they have got to reward her when she trusts them. I thought they did a good job of that." **On the rebounding margin**

"We out-rebounded Maryland, so we can hang our hat on that. But we didn't out-rebound Tennessee. They are just so big and strong. They send Anosike to the boards and then they have Parker too. They are just so smooth around the rim. Our kids can block out and jump and they are athletic but it's not enough. We could have done a little better job, I think." **On Starr Orr**

"We've been waiting for Starr Orr to break out. She came out sharp tonight. She's got to continue that. She's the leading scorer in Alabama high schools. She scored 4,000 points in high school and we've got to get her taking more shots." **Middle Tennessee senior guard/forward Amber Holt**

On her play tonight

"Like coach said, I have to trust my teammates. When I come out to shoot the three they have to guard that and when they shut that down, I can drive or pass to my teammates." **On playing Tennessee**

"I tell the team, 'don't be scared of anybody. Just go out there and play your game.' I told Emily Queen when she's got to guard Candace Parker, 'Don't be scared. She's just like you. She's just another person.' And that's what they did. They just played their game."

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