Blue Raiders fall short at UL, 76-64

Holt scores 32 but Raiders struggle from 3-point range

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. - Amber Holt scored 32 points and grabbed nine rebounds but no other Blue Raider was in double figures and Middle Tennessee hit just 8-of-31 from 3-point range, as Louisville led from start to finish en route to a 76-64 victory Sunday at Freedom Hall. Middle Tennessee trailed the entire contest and started the game very slowly, falling behind 18-7 in the first eight minutes. But the Blue Raiders battled back, cutting the deficit to eight three times in the first half before heading to the locker room trailing, 27-29, at the break. In the second half Middle Tennessee got back in the game on several occasions, cutting the deficit to 53-50 after a Chelsia Lymon 3-pointer with 11:03 remaining. But the Cardinals pushed the lead back to eight points on several occasions, only to watch the Blue Raiders battle back. Middle Tennessee got back within four points twice and trailed by six most of the final 10 minutes before UL pulled away in the final minute. Latoya Barclay added nine points for the Blue Raiders and Anne Marie Lanning posted eight points. Holt scored 15 points in the first half and finished 12-of-24 from the field and 8-for-10 at the foul line. Louisville's Angel McCoughtry matched Holt with 32 points and added 13 rebounds and hit every big shot the Cardinals needed in the second half, including a 3-pointer from the top of the key with two players draped all over her when Middle Tennessee had cut the deficit to three. The Blue Raiders started off very slowly and the Cardinals took full advantage, racing out to an 18-7 advantage eight minutes into the contest. Middle Tennessee started the game 3-for-13 from the field and had six turnovers in the first eight minutes, and Holt was just 1-for-6 from the floor. But the visitors finally slowed down Louisville and Holt found the range, cutting the deficit to eight on two different occasions. Holt's 3-pointer with 7:07 left and Starr Orr's trifecta at 2:31 both put the Raiders down eight and UL headed to the locker room ahead, 37-29, at the break. Holt scored 15 points in the opening 20 minutes, but McCoughtry was 6-of-10 from the field and netted 13. The Cardinals also posted 22 points in the paint, attacking the Blue Raiders' press time-and-again for easy baskets. Middle Tennessee started quickly in the second half, with Holt and Barclay both scoring buckets to cut the deficit to four, but UL answered with an 11-2 run, starting with a 3-pointer from McCoughtry and three other baskets from

the All-American. The Blue Raiders would not go away, though, putting together a 9-2 run of its own, highlighted by a 3-pointer from Lanning and two more scores from Holt. Lymon followed with another trifecta on an assist from Holt, pulling Middle Tennessee within 53-50 with 11:03 remaining. McCoughtry hit a tough 3-pointer the next time down the floor for UL and the Cardinals pushed the lead back to 60-52 with 5:31 left. Holt was fouled on a 3-pointer and hit all three free throws with 4:30 remaining, cutting the UL lead to 61-55. But the Raiders would pull no closer even though Louisville was less than stellar from the foul line, making just 15-of-24 in the second half. Middle Tennessee resumes conference play Thursday, facing rival Western Kentucky in Bowling Green at 7 p.m.

POSTGAME QUOTES

Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Insell

On Louisvillle's ability to handle the press

"They were switching defenses constantly and they were taking time off the clock with their contain press. They do the same stuff we do or maybe we do the same stuff they do. They didn't let us get into our offense. They did a good job. [Angel] McCoughtry is a great player. We cut it back a few times and gained momentum. She came back and hit a big three and that's what she is supposed to do. They have a good team and I wish them all of the luck in the world." **On having a tough time shooting 3-pointers**

"We usually knock those things down. We didn't knock them down today. We were 8-for-31 today and that's not good. We also had some three's that I felt we should have taken. We had Amber going into the heart of the defense and she was looking for someone inside and out. We just didn't take some three's that were there. You have to give them credit for being athletic and being able to get their hand on the ball." **On if the loss might have been attributed to an emotional win against LSU on Friday**

"I don't think anything carried over from the Friday game. Since we've been off the bus, we haven't even talked about it. LSU has never been brought up again. We know Louisville has a great team and is well coached. We knew it was going to be a tough ball game. It was a great crowd and a great atmosphere this afternoon. We need to take this game and learn from it. We had some young kids that were out of the way and didn't know what was going on at times. We are going to need to go back and correct that because we are going to see some of those changes in those defenses again." **On if the team got what they needed from playing a tough non-conference slate**

"I think we got what we needed out of them, but I think we should have at least won one or two more games that we didn't win. We were in some big games. I don't think we could have beaten Tennessee, but we had a shot to beat Maryland. We probably should have beaten Chattanooga and Western Carolina. We had a tough non-conference schedule. We had the eighth toughest schedule in the country and we need to use that as we go into conference play. It's not going to get any easier when we play Western Kentucky in Bowling Green on Thursday night." **On why Middle Tennessee didn't play an easier schedule**

If you are going to take your program to the top, you are going to have to play the top teams. You are going to have to play Maryland, Old Dominion, Tennessee, Arizona and Louisville. You are going to have to play those teams on their floor. We want to get those teams back in Murfreesboro. Next year, Louisville will be coming back to Murfreesboro and playing Middle Tennessee. If you're going to take your program to the next level, you're not going to do that by playing teams going in that you are decidingly favored. Going into those games, we knew we had to take care of the ball and make some good shots and finish. We haven't been able to finish, with the exception of the other night against LSU. We got down to Louisville here today, but we battled back and cut it to three or four points. It's big for our basketball program to do that, but again we had turnovers that took momentum away from us. We've got to do a better job. A lot of that has to be attributed to the fact that we have

a lot of freshmen. At times, we had three freshmen on the floor. Those kids playing with Amber [Holt] are sophomores and freshmen, with the exception of Johnna Abney, who is a junior." **Middle Tennessee senior forward Amber Holt**

On the team's slow start

"First of all, we came out not ready to play. If we would have came out to play like we did at LSU, we would have won this game." **On if the team was ready to play after an emotional win**

"We were ready. It seems like we came out tentative." **On when she sensed the team's ability to come back in the game**

"When we started playing defense. That's when they stopped scoring and we cut it down to four or five." **On a having a competition with Angel McCoughtry**

"No. We are good friends. She is just like me. We are about the same." **On looking forward to playing against McCoughtry**

"Yes. I was looking forward to it. It seems like they wanted it more than we did." **On if the team seemed flat**

"You come out and play hard every game. It seems like we didn't do that. We just came out flat." **On the team's inability to get over the hump**

"I felt that we were getting over the hump. It seems like my teammates were looking more at the scoreboard than playing the game. If we would have played the game, we would have gone further over the hump."

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