Blue Raiders fall at WKU, 85-81

Squad erased 10-point deficit in final minutes

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee erased a 10-point deficit over the final three minutes but Amber Holt's driving layup rimmed out and Western Kentucky hit four free throws in the last 43 seconds, defeating the Blue Raiders, 85-81, Thursday night at E.A. Diddle Arena. The Blue Raiders (7-7, 2-1 Sun Belt) trailed 76-66 with 3:30 remaining before sophomore Chelsia Lymon led a 13-3 run, scoring nine of her 12 points during the run and tying the game at 79 with two free throws with 1:05 left. Middle Tennessee got a five-second call on the in-bounds and Amber Holt took the pass on the Blue Raiders inbounds, but her layup around WKU's Crystal Kelly touched all parts of the rim but did not fall. Dominique Duck was fouled on the next Lady 'Toppers possession and hit two free throws. Holt's turnaround jumper in the lane front-rimmed for the Blue Raiders and Kenzie Rich put the final points on the board for WKU (9-5, 2-0) with two foul shots with 14.1 seconds to play. Holt's 3-pointer was off and the Lady 'Toppers escaped with the four-point victory, ending Middle Tennessee's 26-game winning streak against Sun Belt opposition dating to the 2005-06 season. "I thought we played really hard and our two point guards did a good job distributing the basketball and also finding lanes to the basket to score for us," Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Insell said. "Western Kentucky did a good job hitting the boards in the second half and we didn't rotate at times and block out." Holt led all scorers with 36 points, hitting 17-of-33 from the floor, and Johnna Abney added a season-high 16 for Middle

Tennessee while dishing out four assists and committing just one turnover. The Blue Raiders played the first of at least six games without sophomore forward Brandi Brown and WKU took advantage in the second half, hitting the boards, including eight on the offensive glass. The Blue Raiders had a 33-28 advantage at halftime despite holding the Lady 'Toppers scoreless for almost eight minutes during one stretch and without a field goal for the final 3:56 of the half. But the visitors missed three or four layups and at least two more shots within five feet that could have expanded the lead. WKU took a 7-2 lead at 17:12 in the first half before the Blue Raiders put together a 13-0 run, highlighted by six points each from Holt and Abney. Arnika Brown's layup broke the Lady 'Toppers scoring drought at 9:22. The officials also had a big influence in the first half, with 22 fouls called between the two teams. Abney scored 10 points before the break and Holt added 19, including a turnaround jumper in the lane with 8.6 seconds remaining to give the Blue Raiders the five-point edge. After missing all four 3-point attempts in the first half, the Blue Raiders hit four of their first five to start the second period. But for everything that WKU missed in the first half, shooting just 32 percent, the home team couldn't miss after the break, going on a 24-10 run over seven-plus minutes by shooting 81 percent (17-of-21) for a 64-57 WKU advantage with 7:47 to play. The Lady 'Toppers extended the lead to 72-62 after a Brown jumper off the glass with 5:04 left. But the Blue Raiders would not go away, with Lymon stepping into the limelight to pull the Raiders even. Middle Tennessee starts a two-game homestand Sunday, hosting Denver at 2 p.m. at Murphy Center. **RADIO SHOW STARTS MONDAY:** The Rick Insell Radio Show begins Monday, January 7 from 6-7 p.m. at Bluesboro on the square in Murfreesboro, the first of eight shows this year. The voice of the Blue Raiders, Dick Palmer, will interview Coach Insell about the season and the team's upcoming games against Florida Atlantic and Arkansas State. The show will air every Monday on WMOT 89.5 with one exception. Because of the January 14 contest at Arkansas State, that week's show will be on Tuesday, Jan. 15. **POSTGAME NOTES**

Middle Tennessee's 26-game winning streak versus Sun Belt competition ended with the loss, including 20 consecutive regular season triumphs. The Blue Raiders last loss in league action had been at Florida International on February 27, 2006 ... Amber Holt finished the game 17-for-33 from the field, tying for the fourth most field goals made in a game in program history. Sharon McClanahan posted 17 field goals versus Vanderbilt on December 11, 1978, and Tawanya Mucker tallied 17 against Georgia State on November 27, 1987. The 33 attempts also tied a school record held by Liz Hannah (vs. Western Kentucky on February 26, 1977). Holt also played all 40 minutes for the third straight game and the fourth time in five outings ... Chelsia Lymon set career-highs, making 7-of-8 free throws in the game. Her previous high was 6-for-7 against Old Dominion on December 19, 2006 ... Johnna Abney set season-highs with 16 points and six field goals made. Her previous high for field goals this year was four at Tennessee on December 13 ... Freshmen Emily Queen and Anne Marie Lanning both played season-high minutes in the contest, logging 31 and 34, respectively ... Middle Tennessee fell to 36-5 under head coach Rick Insell against Sun Belt competition. The Blue Raiders also dropped to 54-5 when leading at the half, 19-2 when shooting better than 50 percent from the field and 15-1 when scoring between 80-89 points under Insell ... Middle Tennessee shot a season-best 53 percent from the floor (32-for-60) and also a season-best 85 percent (11-for-13) at the foul line. The Blue Raiders tied their season-low with 16 3-point attempts and also posted a season-low 18 rebounds. **POSTGAME QUOTES**

Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Insell

On Western Kentucky hitting 17 of 21 field goals in the second half

"That's not bad basketball for them and a very poor defensive performance on our part. We knew they were going to penetrate. I thought [Crystal] Kelly got the ball away from Emily [Queen] a couple of times to get a couple of cheap baskets. We had to rotate and we didn't 'swim down' as we like to

call it in our terminology. We had two freshmen and a sophomore on the floor. I'm real proud of our players. We had some defensive lapses, but we'll take this game and learn from it. We'll be back. I don't think they gave any trophies away tonight. We are three games into the conference. The pressure was on them because we were playing on the road. They've got a good basketball team and we knew that coming in." **On not getting the charge call late in the game**
"She [Jackie Pickel] gave up her body. I thought it was a charge, but the referee had a better look at it than I did. He called it a block and it will stand as a block. I'm proud of my young lady for moving in there and giving up her body and doing what she had to do to get the ball back. That's what we teach and we have been looking for that out of some of our younger kids. They were able to do some of that tonight. This game is going to make us a better team." **On the play of the point guards**
"They did a great job. I was proud of Johnna [Abney] and Chelsia [Lymon]. Johnna controlled the game early by coming off the high-pick. Chelsia was able to do some damage and knock down some free throws. I thought we could have been a bit more aggressive on the defensive front. I thought [Amy] McNear did a good job penetrating and dropping a couple of buckets on us. Again, we had some defensive lapses tonight." **On Western Kentucky outrebounding Middle Tennessee, 40-18**
"They are very athletic. Arnika Brown and Crystal Kelly are very athletic. When you've got [Dominique] Duck and [Charlotte] Marshall coming in, you could see with Brandi Brown not being there, they were able to maintain some control. I thought Emily [Queen] fought hard tonight. I thought Angelique [Burtts] did a good job. We wanted to get them some time tonight and we did. We are going to grow from that." **On Western Kentucky snapping Middle Tennessee's 26-game conference win streak**
"Don't take me wrong on this, but I have never even thought about it. In this conference, as tough as it is, I guess it is a big accomplishment. We play hard. Western Kentucky has a great basketball tradition, just like we have. We knew it was going to be tough tonight. Really and truly we never mentioned that. I'm not trying to dodge the question, but I never really thought about it. I think when you dwell on things like that, you tend to take the attention off your players. We never have talked about it. I am proud of it. We have the record and it's going to be tough for somebody else to get it in this conference. We might try to do it again." **Middle Tennessee senior forward Amber Holt**
On the second-half rally by Western Kentucky
"We came out relaxed and thinking we had the game in our hands. If we would have came out like we did in the first half, we would have probably would have won the game. They just stuck with it and they got a lead on us." **On the final run taking an emotional toll on the team**
"I think the final run took out a lot. By me being the go-to player, I am supposed to make that [shot]. Evidently, it didn't fall. We had the two blocks that Jackie [Pickel] took that should have been charges. It took a lot of emotion out of us." **Middle Tennessee sophomore guard Chelsia Lymon**
On helping Amber Holt during the final stretch of the game
"With Amber being our go-to player, everybody has to have her back. I felt that tonight I needed to help Amber out. When the final stretch came down, I wanted to help her out so that she didn't have to work triple as hard to get us back in the game. I was basically thinking what I could do to help our team during the stretch." **On if the team is improving**
"I think we are getting better. We just have to get back in the gym and work harder on defense. Like Amber said, there were a lot of times we fell defensively. We should have held down and stopped the guards from coming up the middle. There were a lot of small things defensively that we need to tighten up on. I think once that we get back into practice and work on that we'll become a better team."

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