

Blue Raiders pull away from South Alabama, 66-46

17-0 run in second half sends Raiders to 15th win of the year

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee put together a 17-0 run in the second half and Amber Holt scored 27 points to lead the Blue Raiders to a 66-46 victory over South Alabama Thursday night at Murphy Center. The Blue Raiders trailed by five at halftime and were down seven early in the second half before forcing South Alabama into a series of turnovers that jump-started the Middle Tennessee offense. The Blue Raiders forced 14 second-half miscues by the Lady 'Jags and turned those into 17 points. It also helped that the outside shot started to fall for the home team, which was 0-for-11 from 3-point range in the first half. The Blue Raiders made 8-of-16 from behind the arc in the second half, with three of the squad's first four buckets after intermission from 3-point range. USA's Jeanette Tucker tied the game at 41 with a layup with 12:34 remaining in the contest, but the Lady 'Jags did not score again for almost nine minutes, two free throws by Amanda Leonard with 3:43 left. Brandi Brown hit a 3-pointer from the top of the key



to start Middle Tennessee's 17-0 run. Holt scored six straight points during the stretch and Latoya Barclay buried a pair of 3-pointers to stretch the lead to 58-41. Holt and Emily Queen both grabbed

eight rebounds for the Blue Raiders, while Chelsia Lymon netted eight points with four assists and four steals. The first half was full of runs by both teams, with South Alabama scoring 11 points in a row after the Blue Raiders netted the first four of the game. Middle Tennessee answered with a 9-0 spurt before the teams traded buckets for the next six minutes. The Lady 'Jags reeled off a 12-2 run for a 30-23 advantage before Holt got a steal and a bucket in the final minute of the half, cutting USA's lead to five at the break. Holt scored 15 of the Blue Raiders 25 points, hitting 5-of-10 from the field while the rest of the squad was only 5-for-17, including missing all 11 attempts from 3-point range. Shakira Nettles posted 10 points for USA and the Lady 'Jags hit four 3-pointers to take the halftime lead. Nettles scored just two points in the second half and was the only USA player in double figures. Middle Tennessee hosts Western Kentucky Sunday at 2 p.m. The game will be shown live on ESPN Regional, Comcast Channel 27 in the Midstate. **THINK PINK AUCTION ON SUNDAY:** Middle Tennessee will be auctioning its pink jerseys after Sunday's game against Western Kentucky with proceeds going to the MTMC Cancer Fund and the Kay Yow/WBCA Cancer Fund.

Beginning at 1 p.m. (when the gates open), fans may sign up for the auction by completing an information sheet at the marketing tables on the track level (located in front of entrance N1 and N2). When you complete the information form, you will be assigned a number for the postgame auction. It is each person's responsibility to keep up with the number until the auction begins after the game.

Following the game, fans will be asked to sit in Sections D, E and F. Bidding will begin at \$100 for each jersey. There will be 10 jerseys in all. Once fans win the bidding, proceed to the marketing table in the endzone on the court in front of the student section to complete the transaction.

POSTGAME NOTES

HOLT CONTINUES CLIMB UP SCORING LISTS: Senior Amber Holt scored 27 points in the game, moving her up the single-season scoring list at Middle Tennessee. Holt passed Jamie Thomatis (639, 2001) for fourth place on the single-season charts and needs just five points to move past Chrissy Givens (667, 2006) for third place and nine points to surpass Tawanya Mucker (671, 1988) for second place. Holt has 1,230 points entering Sunday's game versus Western Kentucky. She needs four points to pass Jonelda Buck (1,233 points, 1996-99) for 15th place and seven points to move past Kay Willbanks (1,236 points, 1984-87) for 14th place on the career scoring list.

COMEBACK IS THE UNUSUAL: For only the second time this season Middle Tennessee overcame a halftime deficit to post a victory. The only other time the Blue Raiders trailed at the half and won this year came January 10 versus Florida International. The club trailed in that game by seven at halftime before posting a 79-63 triumph. Against South Alabama the Blue Raiders were down five at the break before coming back for a 66-46 victory. It was just the fifth time under coach Rick Insell that Middle Tennessee won a game when trailing at halftime. **DEFENSE AGAIN THE KEY:** Middle Tennessee forced South Alabama into 23 turnovers in the game, including 14 in the second half. The Blue Raiders scored 25 points off those turnovers, including 17 after halftime. Middle Tennessee held USA to 46 points for the second time this season and held the Lady 'Jags to opponent season-lows of 15 made field goals and 37 percent (15-for-41) from the field. **TURNOVERS STAY DOWN:** Middle Tennessee committed just nine turnovers of its own in the game, the second contest in the last three outings the Blue Raiders were in single digits. The squad turned the ball over only nine times versus UALR on February 6. It is the third time this season the Blue Raiders have been in single digits. The club had just eight turnovers versus Florida International on December 19. In the last seven games, Middle Tennessee has averaged only 11.3 turnovers per contest (79 total). **TIDBITS:** Middle Tennessee improved to 10-4 all-time against South Alabama and has now won

eight games in a row in the series, with the average margin of victory 20.4 points during the streak ... Latoya Barclay tied her season-high with four rebounds and five 3-point attempts ... Middle Tennessee improved its record to 44-8 in Sun Belt competition under Insell, including 24-1 at home. The Blue Raiders are also 55-4 when holding opponents under 65 points under Insell. **POSTGAME**

QUOTES

Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Insell

On tonight's performance

"We played better half-court defense and we changed our presses a little bit so we were able to match up and trap a little better out of our press the second half. Latoya [Barclay] came out and hit some big shots for us. We had a couple of loose balls where we dove on the floor and were able to come up with it." **On South Alabama**

"They've got a tough team. They shot the ball well from the 3-point line; they are very athletic and had a lot of energy. We started out with a lot of energy; then we had a defensive lapse or two. We lost sight of what we were doing out there for a little bit and the next thing you know they were up on us." We got eight good looks for 3-point [in the first half]. We probably should have knocked down five or six of those. If you do that you set the tempo of the game. When we didn't do that, we didn't have control of the game. A big three was the one Jackie [Pickel] hit; that was a big one. She hit that shot when we needed that, and then she went down and had a defensive play. "We had nine turnovers. We are taking care of the basketball. We ended up getting outrebounded by one but we can live with that. We still are a better basketball team than we are showing right now and you will see us vastly improve from this." **On tonight's win**

"We needed this win; we needed to play at home with our fans. We needed home court advantage; I think we fed off of that tonight. That was big. I thought we had a lot of students here tonight and I hope they come back and help us. This was a big game. We lost two in a row; this was a big win for us tonight. We needed that, our kids needed it. Our kids were very well prepared by our coaches. They studied their scouting reports and they studied their film. We are doing a lot of things right. We just need to put the ball in the hole." **Senior forward Amber Holt**

On thoughts coming into this game

"It was a frustration issue. We came out and were not having fun so we had to buckle up his game and come out and have fun. Everybody played with enthusiasm, we came out in the second half and played defense, dove on the floor for balls and that was good." **On not getting frustrated after missed shots**

"It's a mental thing. Coach [Insell] gets on us in practice about making our shots. We came out mentally tough and didn't let them frustrate us, and that's what we did." **On this game being a must win**

"This game was a must win. The games that we lost, we shouldn't have lost. We had a good game today, we came back strong." **Senior guard Latoya Barclay**

On defensive efforts tonight

"We've been really working on our defense in practice. We tried to give that second effort on defense and just play hard." **On the home crowd**

"The home crowd is good. Every time we score or make a defensive stop, they always give you that motivation, that little pick up that you need. They're a big help." **South Alabama head coach Rick Pietri**

On jumping up early against Middle Tennessee

"In the first half, we played exceptionally well. We followed through with everything that we had planned on doing. The game plan we had coming in was executed relatively well. In the second half, they pushed us, shoved us, grabbed us, held us and took [the ball] from us. We didn't have the

resilience to fight back. It was disappointing because when those things happened, we forgot what we were supposed to be doing in the first place." **On having 23 turnovers compared to Middle Tennessee's nine**

"They force people to turn the ball over. Florida International had 26 turnovers and still beat them. That's going to happen. In the first half, we did a much better job handling the pressure. In the second half, they were more aggressive. They started pushing, holding and grabbing us. If the officials don't call it a foul then it's not a foul. We didn't react well to that. If it's not going to be called, we are going to have to adjust to that." **On the aggressive rebounding play of Patrice Brunner**

"For us to be successful we need that out of her. In terms of rebounding defensively, she did what we asked her to do." **On taking some positives away after the loss**

"There were some positives. We proved that when we are focused and wired in and in tune with what we are prepared to do, we can do things very well. We have yet to prove that we can play well when teams are physical with us and when the game is allowed to be called that physical. We haven't proved that we can manage that physicality very well." **On preparing for Florida Atlantic on Saturday**

"We don't have a lot of time. We have to turn around and play again in 48 hours. We have to play an FAU team that hasn't played in a week. We need to get home and try to get ourselves prepared for a big conference game on Saturday."

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