

Raiders Fall in Title Game

Holt named to All-Tournament Team

March 11, 2008 · Jo Jo Freeman

MOBILE, Ala. - Western Kentucky shot 60 percent in the second half and their forwards stayed out of foul trouble guarding Amber Holt, as WKU defeated Middle Tennessee, 65-49, Tuesday in the championship game of the Sun Belt Tournament at Mitchell Center. The loss ended the Blue Raiders 15-game tournament winning streak and denied Middle Tennessee its fifth straight SBC crown. Holt managed to score 22 points, but the Blue Raiders were undone by a poor shooting performance, hitting just 34 percent from the field, including 4-for-24 from 3-point range. Emily Queen added 11 points and six rebounds for Middle Tennessee in the loss. The teams traded buckets to start the second half for the first four minutes. An eight-minute scoreless stretch for Middle Tennessee (21-11) allowed WKU to put together a 12-0



run and a 44-33 advantage. Amy McNear hit three straight jumpers for the Lady 'Toppers during the stretch and Dominique Duck made the first and last baskets of the run. Holt finally ended the drought with a bucket at 8:25 on the clock, but Kenzie Rich kept the Raiders at bay, knocking down a 3-pointer from the top of the key. Then, as the shot clock was about to expire, Rich double-clutched on a 3-pointer from the wing and drew the foul, completing the four-point play for a 53-39 WKU (26-7) lead. The Lady 'Toppers hit all eight of their foul shots down the stretch, ending a two-game losing streak to the Blue Raiders in SBC Tournament championship games. Holt was named to the All-Tournament Team after eclipsing the SBC Tournament scoring record. Holt netted 88 points in the three games, surpassing the mark set last season by teammate Chrissy Givens (85). She also broke tournament records for field goals (32), field goal attempts (63) and free throws made (24). Rich hit

all three of her 3-point attempts in the second half and was 4-for-5 from behind the arc in the contest, ending the game with a team-high 18 points. Crystal Kelly added 26 points and 11 rebounds and Arnika Brown had 11 points and 11 boards as well. Duck also netted 12 points for the Lady 'Toppers. The first half saw a run by each team and then a long drought by the Blue Raiders, though WKU did not take advantage. Middle Tennessee started slow but registered a 10-0 run that featured a putback and a 3-pointer from Queen and then another 3-pointer by Jackie Pickel that put the Raiders ahead, 18-10. WKU answered with an 8-0 stretch to tie the contest with four points from Duck. The Blue Raiders went more than seven minutes without a point during WKU's run. Holt's bucket with 3:57 left in the half ended the drought and the Raiders continued to hold the lead until Rich nailed a 3-pointer from the corner with 26.4 seconds remaining to give the Lady 'Toppers a 25-24 advantage at the break. The Blue Raiders were just 8-of-27 from the field, including 2-for-13 from 3-point range, in the half, while Holt scored 10 points on just eight shots. Middle Tennessee must wait until the NCAA Selection Show on Monday, March 16, to find out if it receives an at-large bid into the tournament and a fifth straight trip to the postseason. **POSTGAME NOTES**

SBC TOURNAMENT STREAK ENDS: Middle Tennessee's 15-game winning streak in the Sun Belt Tournament ended with the 65-49 loss to Western Kentucky. The Blue Raiders had won four straight SBC Tournament titles and had not lost in the conference championships since falling to WKU on March 11, 2003, in the final of the SBC Tournament. Middle Tennessee has played in six straight tourney championship games, tying for the third longest streak in SBC history. **HOLT MOVES INTO NATIONAL SINGLE-SEASON SCORING LIST:** Senior Amber Holt scored 22 points in the loss to Western Kentucky, giving the senior 868 points this season and moving her into the national Top 20 for points in a season. Holt passed Lisa Foss of Northern Illinois (853 points, 1991) as well as Northwestern's Anucha Brown (1985), St. Joseph's Dale Hodges (1990) and Vanderbilt's Wendy Scholtens (1990), who all scored 855 points. Holt ranks 17th on the national list, only four points behind Penn State's Kelly Mazzante (872 points, 2002) and five behind Delta State's Deborah Temple (873 points, 1984). Holt needs 40 points to reach the Top 10 in the list. **TURNOVERS NOT A PROBLEM:** Middle Tennessee has taken care of the basketball for most of the season and turnovers were not a problem in the loss to Western Kentucky. The Blue Raiders committed only 10 miscues in the contest, three in the first half and seven in the second half. In the last 14 games, the Blue Raiders have committed just 11.5 turnovers per contest with only one game of more than 14 miscues. **QUEEN POSTS DOUBLE FIGURES:** Freshman Emily Queen posted 11 points and six rebounds versus Western Kentucky, her fifth double-digit effort of the season and the first since February 9. Queen hit 4-of-8 shots from the field, including a pair of 3-pointers, and added a pair of assists in 34 minutes. Four of Queen's five double-figure contests this season came against Sun Belt competition. **ORR MOVES CLOSER TO TOP:** Senior Starr Orr played in her 118 career games at Middle Tennessee, tying Jonelda Buck (1996-99) and Natalie Sneed (1995-98) for fourth all-time. The only players to have played more are Patrice Holmes (124, 2002-05), Chrissy Givens (125, 2004-07) and Krystle Horton (129, 2004-07). Senior Latoya Barclay has played in 112 career contests, three games from tying for 10th on the all-time list. **TIDBITS:** Middle Tennessee dropped to 4-2 in Sun Belt Tournament championship games and 10-6 all-time in tournament title contests. The Blue Raiders also dropped to 19-4 all-time in the SBC Tournament and 3-2 versus Western Kentucky in the SBC tourney ... The Blue Raiders scored a season-low 49 points, the fewest point scored during head coach Rick Insell's three seasons at Middle Tennessee and the least scored since a 59-46 loss to Notre Dame in the second round of the NCAA Tournament in 2004. It was the first time the Blue Raiders scored less than 50 points in a game since netting exactly 50 in a two-point loss at Tennessee Tech on December 9, 2004, a span of 121 contests. Middle Tennessee shot a team season-best 90 percent (9-for-10) from the foul line in the game. **POSTGAME QUOTES**

Middle Tennessee freshman forward Emily Queen

On if the team will be playing in the post season

"I agree that we still have basketball ahead of us. We will know Monday after the selection show."

On Western Kentucky capitalizing on Middle Tennessee's mistakes

"They were capitalizing on our turnovers. It's not typical of us." **Middle Tennessee head coach Rick Insell**

On if the team lacked confidence

"I don't think so. I don't see any lack of confidence in this bunch. Sometimes we don't shoot the ball as we should or maybe not get the right angle. It's not a lack of confidence." **On if Amber Holt had anything to prove in the conference tournament**

"To be honest, Amber wasn't set out to prove anything individually. I don't think any of that crossed her mind. She is the best player in the conference and she has proven that all year long. She didn't have to come to this tournament to prove that. It's not like where you walk in and a kid shows up and scores 40 points. They knew Amber Holt was coming in the door. They started to double and triple team her during the season and she was playing with two freshmen and two sophomores most of the time. She took care of them all year until they grew up mentally, emotionally and physically. Amber Holt is a very strong individual and has a great career ahead of her. She will be very successful. As far as trying to prove anything in the tournament, I never heard Amber say anything negative about the selection process in the conference." **On if Middle Tennessee deserves an at-large NCAA bid**

"At one time, we played four teams out of the top 10 in the country. Not very many teams have done that. We beat one of them, LSU. We played Tennessee until the five-minute mark. We had a chance to win the game at Maryland, but they called a charging foul on Chelsia [Lymon]. I'm proud of what our kids have done. They have carried the Middle Tennessee flag all year and they have carried it proudly. We have won some big games. Not many people can go into Arizona and Houston and come out with a win. We did that with freshmen, sophomores and Amber Holt. Then you beat LSU at home in front of 9,000 people. Should we be considered for an at-large bid? Absolutely. If you are looking at some other teams that are at-large candidates, why don't you look at their non-conference schedule? You won't see any teams on their non-conference schedule that is on ours or on Western Kentucky's. Western Kentucky and Middle Tennessee go and put our teams and schools on the line every night. Once other schools pick up their schedules, our conference's RPI is going to increase and hopefully we can get two or three bids from our conference in the tournament every year. Yes sir, I think we deserve to be there."

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