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Blue Raiders fall 2-1 in home opener Set to host Belmont on Sunday at 1 PM

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn.- Middle Tennessee scored early but failed to hold their lead for the second-straight match as they opened the 2008 home schedule with a hard-fought 2-1 defeat to the Vanderbilt Commodores at Blue Raider Field on Friday night.

The Blue Raiders drew 1-1 with the Jacksonville State Gamecocks in Jacksonville, Ala. last Saturday and were greeted by a thunderous crowd at their home field. Middle Tennessee came into the game having not lost a home-opening match since they fell 2-1 to Jacksonville State to begin the 2001 season.

"I think it was a good, fairly even game. Vanderbilt is a very strong team in the air and got to a lot of second balls that they were able to convert to attacks," said Head Coach Aston Rhoden.

Freshman forward **Shan Jones** opened the scoring in the 11th minute to the delight of the 932 in attendance with her first career goal. She received the ball at the top of the box and fired home a bending shot over the outstretched arms of Vanderbilt goalkeeper Rachel Bachtel to put the Blue Raiders out in front.

"Shan had a good game but I know she can improve. We as a coaching staff have to put her as well as other players in positions that play to their strengths," Rhoden said. "We look forward to more strong play from her as she becomes more familiar with the team."

The Commodores responded in the 29th minute when Molly Kinsella received a great flick-on header from Emily Grant and put the ball past a sprawling Kela Casiple and into the back of the net. The sophomore goalkeeper finished the game with a career-high 12 saves, second most in school history.

"Kela had a very solid match and that is something we have come to expect from her. When you have a goalkeeper that played as well as she did tonight then it gives you an opportunity to win games," Rhoden said.

Vanderbilt scored the winner in the 32nd minute when Amy Wilcox took advantage of a mistake by the Blue Raider defense and tucked a ball home for the deciding score.

Middle Tennessee created several good chances in the second half but could not find an equalizer. Sophomore defender **Fran Howells** highlighted the Blue Raider defensive effort by preventing several late Commodore scoring opportunities late in the match.

"It was a very big test and despite the loss we can take a lot of positive things out of the match. We fought hard and played for the full 90 minutes," Rhoden said. "We kept believing and that led to us creating opportunities where we could have won the game."



Sophomore goalkeeper Kela Casiple made a career-high 12 saves in the loss, good for second-most in school history. (MT) <#>

Despite the loss, the exciting atmosphere at Blue Raider Field certainly had a positive effect on the play of the Blue Raiders.

"Our fans really help us and we are very disappointed we didn't let them leave with a win. I think they saw a team that will play hard and fight for a full match," Rhoden said. "It is great to have so many supporters."

Middle Tennessee returns to action when they face the Belmont Bruins at Blue Raider Field on Sunday. Kickoff is scheduled for 1 PM.

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