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## Blue Raiders fall 1-0 to Belmont Host Middle Tennessee Classic next week

David Powell



Sophomore forward Kelly Downs had a shot cleared off the line in the second half as the Blue Raiders fell 1-0 against Belmont. (MT)

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**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.-** Middle Tennessee went behind early and could not find an equalizer despite having opportunities as they fell 1-0 to the Belmont Bruins at Blue Raider Field on Sunday afternoon.

The Blue Raiders were coming off a tough 2-1 loss to Vanderbilt. The hard-fought match saw the home squad go ahead in the 11th minute when freshman **Shan Jones** burst through the Commodore defense and curled a ball into the back of the net. Vanderbilt scored two goals at the end of the half to go out front for good.

"These two defeats are very disappointing. Even though both were to good teams, we didn't take advantage of the chances we created," Rhoden said. "That is why they both ended in one-goal games."

The Blue Raiders stressed the importance of efficient possession and consistent finishing after the first two matches of the season and they provided glimpses of that chemistry during the opening portion of the match. Despite this, things changed in the 16th minute of play.

Sophomore defender **Fran Howells** was judged to have committed a foul in the air against Belmont forward Patience Whitten and the resulting set-piece opportunity was curled over the four-person wall and off the fingertips of goalkeeper Kela Casiple, just inside the post.

"We are not clicking on all cylinders. Our possession game, which is at the heart of what we do is not there. The players are rushing things and there is not a lot of mobility so we are giving the ball away too easily," Rhoden said. "We have to be better at it so we can create better chances."

The Blue Raiders pushed forward as the half wore on but the positive possession they enjoyed began to break down as they searched for the equalizer. Middle Tennessee out shot Belmont 19-11, including holding a 12-3 advantage in the second half.

Middle Tennessee almost tied the match in the 29th minute when freshman midfielder **Hope Suominen** released **Shan Jones** into the area, but the sprinting forward's blast went just wide of the far post.

"At halftime we stressed the importance of keeping the ball more. We needed to work to find the strikers in the seams and be able to keep their goalkeeper under more pressure by shooting from the outside," Rhoden said. "They had dropped really deep so we needed to draw them out."

The Blue Raiders began the second period with better movement and were more successful in finding links between the midfield and forwards but a lack of finishing again proved to be costly. Kelly Downs saw her shot cleared off the line after a corner kick in the 57th minute and the follow up by Howells go into the arms of a diving Belmont goalkeeper Sari Lin.

"We are known to be a good possession team that creates many chances per game. Our

possession game is not there so the chances are not being created. But, when we do create them we are not finishing them," Rhoden said. "We need to get back in a rhythm because the more we create the more likely we will be to finish opportunities."

The Blue Raiders return to action when they open the Middle Tennessee Classic with a match against the Texas Tech Red Raiders. Kickoff is set for 6:30 PM on Friday. Live audio for the match is available exclusively on GoBlueRaiders.com.

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