Blue Raiders down Ole Miss 1-0

Begin Sun Belt Conference play against FIU next week

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. Middle Tennessee went ahead moments before the stroke of halftime through a Shan Jones wonder strike and the Blue Raiders held strong in the second half as they defeated the Ole Miss Rebels 1-0 at Blue Raider Field on Friday night. The Blue Raiders were coming off a 3-0 loss to Oral Roberts at the Tulsa Soccer Invitational last Sunday, a tournament in which the Blue Raiders also picked up their first win of the season with a 1-0 shutout of the host Tulsa Golden Hurricane two days previous. Middle Tennessee scored following a dramatic sequence in the closing seconds of the first half through an amazing goal by forward Shan Jones. With just seven seconds remaining until halftime, midfielder Jaimee Cooper struck a long shot from straight-away 30 yards that was deflected directly into the path of Jones. The freshman struck a looping first-time strike into the corner of the goal as the clock hit just two seconds remaining for her team-leading fifth goal of the season. "Shan's goal came at a great time in the game. Many goals are scored towards the end of each half as teams lose concentration and we took advantage of that," Rhoden said. "It gave us a lot of confidence going into the locker room at halftime and we wanted to come out in the second half and get another goal." Ole Miss pushed forwards towards the end of the match and created several chances where there could have been equalizer if not for a combination of superb Blue Raider defending and poor finishing. Although their dangerous forwards threatened throughout the second half, Ole Miss's best opportunities to level came in the final ten minutes. In the 82nd minute the Rebels crossed the ball into the area from the near side only to see it pinball off several players from both squads and finally onto the foot of Abbie Curran. The forward's low strike split two defenders but ended up in the arms of well-positioned Blue Raider goalkeeper Kela Casiple. "I think our defense, including our goalkeeper, have played well so far this year. Ole Miss tried to get a goal and we came under a lot of pressure for the

last few minutes," Rhoden said. "Our defenders played strong and cohesive and helped preserve the shutout for us." Ole Miss almost pulled out a dramatic winner in the 89th minute but the Blue Raider defense, who had been stellar all night in shutting down the opposition's forwards, saved the day for the home side. Middle Tennessee allowed a corner kick to bounce clear in the area and the two resulting shots were blocked by two defenders only for the ball to run onto the foot of Ole Miss forward Taylor Cunningham. With the Blue Raiders seemingly stranded out of position Blue Raider midfielder Jaimee Cooper was on hand to provide a first-class sliding tackle to preserve Middle Tennessee's first victory at home in 2008. "It is great to get a win at home and it was even more special because it was against a quality opponent like Ole Miss. I think the team played really hard and they executed our game plan well," Rhoden said. "It is a step in the right direction going into [Sun Belt] Conference play." The Blue Raiders return to action next Friday when they travel to Miami, Fla. to take on the Florida International Golden Panthers. Kickoff is scheduled for 6 PM. The match can be followed live by selecting the appropriate links on GoBlueRaiders.com.

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