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Blue Raiders defeat FIU 2-1

Pick up hard-fought win in Sun Belt opener

David Powell

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MIAMI- Middle Tennessee took an impressive two-goal lead into the half and held strong under intense pressure over the final 45 minutes to defeat the Florida International Golden Panthers 2-1 in their opening game of Sun Belt Conference play at University Park on Friday night.

The Blue Raiders were coming off a 1-0 victory over Southeastern Conference foe Ole Miss last Friday at Blue Raider Field. The confidence-building win was just what the team needed heading into the conference opener.

Middle Tennessee took the lead in 23rd minute after an impressive offensive sequence by a trio of Blue Raider forwards. Kelly Downs found the ball just outside of the Blue Raider attacking third of play. The sophomore played to the feet of [Shan Jones](#) at top of the box who found [Heather McDonnell](#) making a clever diagonal run through the area.

The freshman calmly slotted the ball inside the near post past a sprawling Melanie Raimo for her first career collegiate goal.

The Blue Raiders widened their lead in the 44th minute of play. [Vanessa Mueggler](#) struck an in-swinging corner kick from the near side that went through the box and onto the foot of [Jaimee Cooper](#). The midfielder sent a one-time ball back into the box that came off the feet of several defenders before falling to freshman Jones.

The forward pounded her team-leading sixth goal into the back of the net from five yards out.


Florida International equalized five minutes into the second half when defender Katrina Rose hit a curling free kick from 40 yards that caught Blue Raider goalkeeper Kela Casiple out of position.

The Golden Panthers piled on the pressure as the half wore on but it was the backline of [Fran Howells](#), [Nenita Burgess](#), [Emily Snowdon](#) and [Elise Hutter](#) that held strong against the attacking threat as the Blue Raiders picked up the impressive result.

"This was a great win against a quality opponent to open Sun Belt play," said Head Coach Aston Rhoden. "We performed very well in the first half and held strong against a very good Florida International team in the second half. We now have to focus our attention to Florida Atlantic."

Middle Tennessee looks to pick up their season-high third straight win when they face the FAU Owls on Sunday. Kickoff is slated for 11 AM EDT.



Freshman Heather McDonnell scored her first career collegiate goal in the 23rd minute to put Middle Tennessee out in front. (MT) 

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