Blue Raiders fall 2-1 to Arkansas State

Handed first loss in Sun Belt Conference play

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JONESBORO, Ark. - Middle Tennessee went down early in the second half and could not capitalize off a one-player advantage over the last 30 minutes of the match as they fell 2-1 to the Arkansas State Red Wolves on Friday evening. The Blue Raiders (6-5-2, 4-1-0) came into the match winners of five straight, including an impressive 4-0 victory of South Alabama at Blue Raider Field last Sunday. Jen Threlkeld scored her first goal of the season in the 25th minute when she rose above two defenders to head home off a corner kick. Arkansas State (4-7-1, 1-3-1) snapped a seven-game losing streak with a 1-1 tie against Louisiana-Monroe last Sunday after starting the season with three straight wins. The Red Wolves sat three spots from the bottom in conference standings heading into the match. Middle Tennessee found themselves with a limited number of chances as the first half progressed were unable to combine on a consistent basis through the final third of the field. Threlkeld found herself with space in the box in the 24th minute but a fine defensive play by Red Wolves defender Miranda Wiley prevented the junior forward from getting a shot off with a sliding tackle. The Red Wolves successfully overloaded the center of the field and Middle Tennessee failed to use the width that had become a staple of their unbeaten run during the first 45 minutes. The half came to a close with both sides failing to capitalize on the small number of chances each had created. Arkansas State went in front in the 51st minute when Michele Clark found the ball at her feet after a scramble in the Blue Raider box. The midfielder drove it past goalkeeper Kela Casiple and into the back of the net. The Blue Raiders looked to have equalized just two minutes

later but the goal-scoring play was called back for offsides. Heather McDonnell got on the end of a deflected shot that was saved by ASU goalkeeper Megan Stoltzfus and did well to finish into the back of the net but the assistant referee had raised his flag on the far side. Freshman Hope Suominen found herself clear on goal in the 57th after receiving a bouncing cross from the far side, but the midfielder missed just wide on a one-time shot to the near post. "We had plenty of opportunities to put the game away and did take advantage of them," Head Coach Aston Rhoden. "Give credit to Arkansas State because they kept fighting and believing. They played a strong defensive game and got two goals against the run of play." Middle Tennessee pushed forward after ASU midfielder Bernadette Dierker was sent off for her second professional foul and finally equalized through a skillful Shan Jones strike in the 60th minute. The freshman dribbled past two players and rifled home a curling drive from 30 yards for her team-leading ninth goal of the season. The Red Wolves scored what proved to be the game-winning goal in the 64th minute. ASU Defender Miranda Wiley smacked a free kick that bounced off the crossbar and onto to the head of Clark that was finished for her second goal of the match. "This one is history and we will take a few things from it and try and rebound on Sunday," Rhoden said. "We need to have a stronger and more consistent performance against Arkansas-Little Rock." Middle Tennessee concludes the weekend with a match against the Arkansas-Little Rock Trojans on Sunday. Kickoff is scheduled for 1 p.m. Live audio and statistics will be unavailable for the match.

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