

Blue Raiders Set Up Title Showdown With 5-1 Win

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee has set up a championship showdown for its first Sun Belt soccer title by virtue of exploding for five first-half goals and going on to beat South Alabama, 5-1, at the Blue Raider Soccer Field Friday afternoon.

The Blue Raiders (11-4-1, 5-1-1 SBC) will face Louisiana-Lafayette at Blue Raider Field Sunday at 2 p.m. with no worse than a share of the championship at stake. Middle Tennessee and North Texas, which will play host to Florida International, enter play Sunday with identical league marks.

"It's a good feeling to be going into our final regular-season game with one of our goals in front of us, but it's also a scary feeling because we have never been this close," third-year Middle Tennessee coach Aston Rhoden said. "We have 90 minutes left to accomplish our first goal. Today's win is really pleasing because we created opportunities and we finished them. We obviously had great leadership from our seniors. They played with purpose."



Friday's game kicked off "Family Weekend" and five Blue Raider seniors - Debs Brereton, Ashley Elliott, Danielle LaDuke, Laura Miguez and Jessica Northcutt - will be honored prior to Sunday's game. The South Alabama win certainly had a senior flavor to it as Brereton connected for two goals and an assist, while LaDuke and Miguez also scored. Rachel Holmes added the other Middle Tennessee goal. Lisa-Marie Woods assisted on two goals, while freshmen Kaley Forrest and Holly Grogan assisted on one each.

"This is a big win for our team and now it's down to one big game," said LaDuke, who started the scoring in the 10th minute. "We are playing very well right now in all areas and that's the pleasing thing because everyone is playing a part."

Middle Tennessee stretched its home winning streak to 10 dating to last season and is unbeaten in its last seven games (6-0-1), which is the longest unbeaten stretch in a season for the Blue Raiders. The Blue Raiders lived up to their billing as the nation's No. 2 offense with the five quick goals in the opening half, but Middle Tennessee never allowed South Alabama's offense, ranked No. 3 nationally, to get untracked.

The Middle Tennessee defense limited South Alabama to no shots in the first half and just seven for the game. The Blue Raiders were on the attack from the outset and they seized all momentum during a 2:31 span midway into the first half. LaDuke's breakaway in the 10th minute started the scoring and Brereton followed with back-to-back goals in the 11th and 12th minutes to send the Blue Raiders to a 3-0 lead less than 13 minutes into the action. Middle Tennessee tacked on two goals just before halftime.

Making the outbreak even more impressive is Middle Tennessee struck for five first-half goals against Jags keeper Amber Angermeier, who entered the match having allowed just 11 goals all season.

GAME NOTES

Senior Debs Brereton set the single-season goals record in the match with her 14th and 15th goals of the season. The 15 goals also ranks fifth on the career list behind teammates Laura Miguez and Danielle LaDuke and former Blue Raiders Emily Carter and Hailee Walsh. Brereton also added to her single-season point total, which now stands at 38. LaDuke's goal in the 10th minute gave the Blue Raiders an early 1-0 lead and, at the time, tied Miguez for the career goals lead with 26. Miguez netted a score to retake first place in the 25th minute. Freshman keeper Jenny Manis picked up her 11th win of the season, tying teammate Danielle Perreault for the single-season mark set last season. The club won its 10th consecutive home match dating to last season and eighth straight at home this season with the victory. The squad improved to 6-0-1 in the last seven matches, the longest unbeaten stretch in school history in one season. The seven-match unbeaten stretch is the longest for one season in school history and ranks second all-time behind the eight-match stretch put together from October 25, 1998 to September 18, 1999 (eight straight wins). The squad moved to 5-1-1 in Sun Belt play, tying the school record set last season for conference wins in a season. The team is just one victory from tying the 2003 mark for overall wins in a campaign (12). Sophomore Lisa-Marie Woods tallied a pair of assists in the win, giving her seven helpers for the season, ranking third on the club. The seven assists ranks sixth on the single-season list and is just one from tying for third. The remarkable feat is Woods has 11 points in just 11 matches, missing the first five outings of the season because of injury. Brereton was named the Alexander Automotive Family Offensive Player of the Game. Northcutt was named the Defensive Player of the Game.

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