

Brereton, Woods Power Blue Raiders Past Arkansas State, 5-2

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MIAMI - Debs Brereton and Lisa-Marie Woods proved Sun Belt Coaches right Wednesday.

The day after Brereton was named Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year and Woods earned the SBC Newcomer of the Year award, they combined for four goals and an assist as No. 1 seed Middle Tennessee turned back No. 8 seed Arkansas State, 5-2, in the quarterfinals of the Aeropostale SBC Championships at Florida International's University Park.

"They certainly justified their awards," Middle Tennessee coach Aston Rhoden said. "It was a nice way to start the tournament and they helped to get us going but it was a total team win and one we had to work hard to earn."



Middle Tennessee moved to within two wins of earning the Sun Belt Conference's automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament and although the Blue Raiders (13-4-1) inched closer to the coveted prize with Wednesday's win, they are maintaining the same approach that has enabled them to enjoy the best season in school history - one game at a time.

"Our philosophy all year long has been 90 minutes at a time," Rhoden said. "We're just glad to get through this one. ASU has a good team, and to get through this one feels good. Now it's on to the next one."

Middle Tennessee will face No. 4 seed Florida International in the semifinals Thursday at 3 p.m.

Brereton scored two goals to raise her season total to 18, Woods added two goals and an assist,

and Rachel Holmes netted a goal and added an assist to pace the Blue Raider offense against Arkansas State.

Woods broke a scoreless tie in the 23rd minute when she got a penalty kick past Indians keeper Brielan Smiechowski to give the Blue Raiders the lead for good. Woods added her second goal in the 67 minute when she stole the ball from a defender and scored on a breakaway.

"It's nice to get this first win because the first one is always toughest," Woods said. "We played well and Arkansas State was a tough opponent, just like we knew they would be. Now we have to get rested and focused for the semifinals."

Brereton's 17th goal of the season on an assist from Holmes pushed Middle Tennessee's lead to 2-0 in the 26th minute, which is the way it stood until the half. The Blue Raiders continued their strong defensive play and allowed just three shots in the first 45 minutes.

"Once we won the regular season I believe we started gaining more confidence instead of being defensive," Blue Raider defender Katy Rayburn said. "We respect our opponent and that's a big key. The first game is always the hardest mentally and it was good to get this win and get use to playing here. Now our focus is on winning the next game."

Brereton started the scoring in the second half when she scored an unassisted goal in the 67th minute to increase the lead to 3-0. Arkansas State closed to within 4-1 in the 73rd minute, but Holmes scored an unassisted goal, her eighth of the season, six minutes later to push the advantage back to a comfortable 5-1 edge.

NOTES: Middle Tennessee set a school record for single-season wins (13) with Wednesday's victory, besting the 12 wins the Blue Raiders totaled in 2003 ... Brereton, already the single-season record holder in goals (18) and points (45), also moved to No. 5 on the career goals list and No. 5 on the career points lists ... Three of Middle Tennessee's top five goals producers all-time are on the 2004 squad - Laura Miguez (No. 1 with 28), Danielle LaDuke (No. 2 with 26) and Brereton (No. 5 with 18) ... Woods moved into a tie for eighth on the career assists lists with her eighth helper Wednesday, joining Shannon Broadwell (1996-99) and Hailee Walsh (1998-99) ... The Blue Raiders improved to 6-0 all-time against Arkansas State with Wednesday's win.

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