Blue Raiders snatch late equalizer against WKU

Threlkeld scores with just nine seconds remaining

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee scored a dramatic header with just nine seconds left in the match as they spoiled Western Kentucky's Sun Belt Conference title hopes with a 2-2 draw at Blue Raider Field on Friday night. Middle Tennessee was coming off two road losses to the Denver Pioneers and North Texas Mean Green last weekend that dropped them to fourth place in the conference standings, one spot behind the rival Hilltoppers who split to two games against the same opponents. Middle Tennessee had already clinched the fourth seed in next weeks Sun Belt Conference Tournament, but was determined to play the role of spoiler against Western Kentucky. The Hilltoppers needed only a win and a draw in the match between Denver and North Texas to win a share of the conference regular-season title. The Blue Raiders did not have much time to settle into the match when with just over a minute gone, Hilltopper forward Megan Meinke latched onto a ball and drove a shot from seven yards out past Middle Tennessee goalkeeper Kela Casiple to put the visitors on top 1-0. Middle Tennessee equalized just six minutes later when Jen Threlkeld took advantage of a miscommunication between Hilltopper goalkeeper L.B. Wathen and her defense. After watching a ball bounce into the top of the box, the junior sprinted forward into the area around defender Morgan Thomas to tap the ball past the goalkeeper for her fourth strike of the season. Western Kentucky

retook the lead in the 33rd minute when Kellie Walker pounced onto a high ball in the Blue Raider box and let it bounce once before slotting home a nice one-touch shot from 10 yards out. "In the first half we were giving them too much time and space to play the deep passes," Head Coach Aston Rhoden said. "They were successful at it and created two goals for them. We talked about closing down a lot quicker, playing shorter and establishing a rhythm in the second half." The Blue Raiders pressured throughout the second half, outshooting the Hilltoppers 13-2, but looked like they would be at the losing end come the final whistle despite their best efforts. They piled on waves of pressure into the Western Kentucky end only to see the final ball cleared back into their own half. Middle Tennessee pushed forward once again as the match reached its final moments and the ball found Kim Farrant on the near side. The forward did well to beat her defender to the end line and serve a well-hit ball into the box that found Threlkeld at the back post. The junior rose above two defenders to nod the ball just under the crossbar for her second goal of the match. The Blue Raiders maintained the majority of the possession in the two overtime periods but could not find the winner. "The second goal displayed great character by the team especially Kim and Jen," Rhoden said. "That type of effort is what you expect from upperclassmen and one that we will need going into the conference tournament." Middle Tennessee begins Sun Belt Conference Tournament play on Wednesday against Florida Atlantic at 1 p.m. Live audio will be available on GoBlueRaiders.com and video will be provided on SunBeltSports.org for $9.95.

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