Blue Raiders fall 2-1 at Sun Belt Tournament

Go in front early but lose in overtime

November 5, 2008 · David Powell

DENTON, Texas - Middle Tennessee opened the scoring just six minutes in but could not pick up the victory as they were knocked out of the Sun Belt Conference Tournament with a 2-1 loss to Florida Atlantic at Mean Green Soccer Complex on a windy Wednesday afternoon. The Blue Raiders (9-8-3) came into the match having clinched the fourth seed in the conference tournament after completing the regular season portion of the Sun Belt schedule with a 2-2 draw with rival Western Kentucky last Friday. Jen Threlkeld provided the match-tying goal with a header with just nine seconds remaining. The fifth-seeded Owls (7-9-2) entered the game having lost just once in their previous seven matches and holding a 5-4-2 Sun Belt record. They concluded conference play with a scoreless draw at Florida Atlantic last weekend. Middle Tennessee struck first in the sixth minute through a spectacular strike by Hope Suominen. The freshman ran onto the ball 35 yards from the goal and turned to see Florida Atlantic goalkeeper Jessica Badders off of her line. The midfielder launched a high shot towards the opposing goal that tipped off the hand of the back-tracking Badders before falling inside the near post. The Blue Raiders continued to successfully attack down the flanks but it was Florida Atlantic that equalized in the 14th minute. Owls defender Janelle Blake drove a free kick into the Middle Tennessee area that floated in the tough conditions and skipped off the hand of Blue Raider goalkeeper Kela Casiple. The resulting ball fell directly onto the feet of midfielder Brittany Comer who easily tapped it into the back of the net from six yards. Middle Tennessee continued to fight for control of the midfield and enjoyed the majority of possession as the match wore on. Both teams had chances to take the lead on several occasions but were unable to break through. The Blue Raiders held a 21-15 advantage in shots in the match, including 10-4 in the second half. The Blue Raiders

came close to taking a 2-1 advantage twice during the final five minutes of regular time, but Blue Raider attack saw their shots go wide of the net after several doing well to create multiple scoring opportunities. During extra time, Florida Atlantic began to drop players back behind the ball to stifle the Blue Raider attack and the Middle Tennessee backline took advantage of this and pushed forward to create new avenues of attack for the fourth-seeded side. However, it was Florida Atlantic that came out on top when Ashley Mannarino found herself in the box at the end of a Jannica Tjeder diagonal pass. The speedy forward curled a shot inside the near post to give the Owls the win. "This was a tough way to finish the season. I was really pleased with the effort the team played with during the second half and overtime," Head Coach Aston Rhoden. "I felt we controlled most of the game and were unlucky to not finish our scoring opportunities."

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