

Lady Raiders Return Home For 69-56 Win over South Carolina

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee women's basketball (5-4) returned home in style, with a 69-56 win over South Carolina (2-6) Saturday in the Murphy Center.

In the final minute of the game, the Lady Raiders were 6-of-6 from the free throw line to turn back a possible South Carolina comeback. Senior guard Patrice Holmes hit the final four free throws of the game to ensure a Middle Tennessee victory.

Middle Tennessee built a comfortable lead to end the first half 37-24, forcing 16 Gamecock turnovers and snagging 11 steals.

Sophomore Krystle Horton scored 12 of her game-leading 18 points in the first half and also had seven rebounds.



South Carolina came out in the second half and went on a 17-4 run in the first seven minutes to tie the game 41-41. Senior guard Ciara Gray hit her second three-pointer of the game to put the Lady Raiders back ahead 44-41 with 11:54 to play. A jumper by South Carolina's Ilona Burgrova cut the Middle Tennessee lead back to one, but Middle Tennessee answered back off a jumper by sophomore Chrissy Givens. South Carolina never got closer than four points in the remaining minutes of the game.

South Carolina was forced into a total of 24 turnovers in the game to the Lady Raiders 19 and the Lady Raiders scored 25 points off turnovers. The Gamecocks shot a percent better than Middle Tennessee with 42.3 percent to the Lady Raiders 41.8, but the game was won at the free throw line with Middle Tennessee hitting 20-of-30 from the charity stripe.

Middle Tennessee had four players reach double figures in the game, with Horton leading the way with 18. Stovall had 14, Chrissy Givens added 13 and Holmes poured in 11.

The Lady Raiders play their final game before the Christmas break on December 21 when the team hosts Austin Peay. Tip-off is set for 2 p.m.

NOTES:

CI FOR THREE: Senior Ciara Gray is rounding into form, hitting a pair of three-pointers in the contest. The last time the LaVergne, Tenn., native had two three's in the contest came December 30, 2003 against Lipscomb.

HOLMES INTO SIXTH: Senior Patrice Holmes scored only 11 points in the contest but dished out four assists, moving the Bishopville, S.C., native into sixth on the all-time list with 373. Holmes needs eight more assists to pass Julie Morrison (1990-93) for fifth.

TIDBITS: Junior Tia Stovall recorded five steals in the contest, tying a career-high ... The Lady Raiders defeated an SEC opponent for the second straight year and improves to 2-1 all-time against South Carolina. The 13-point margin of victory also ranks as the biggest win over an SEC opponent in school history, a stretch of 87 games ... The Lady Raiders won their second straight home game over an SEC foe (last season vs. Alabama), only the second time that has happened in school history. The previous time came November 17 (Kentucky) and December 11 (Vanderbilt) of 1978.

QUOTES:

FORWARD KRYSTLE HORTON: "South Carolina was a very big and tall team and we have always been taught to take a team like that off the dribble if you can't stop them. We knew coming into the game we were going to have to get back in transition so we could get a lot of transition points. I think the three point basket by Ciara [Gray] in the second half was a big momentum boost for us, because the game was tied, and basketball is a game of runs and it was huge for us to get the lead back."

HEAD COACH STEPHANY SMITH: "It was nice to be back in the Murphy Center and have the support from our fans. They were very vocal and evident in the play of the game. It was obvious the team was focused and ready for this basketball game, not that they aren't always focused, but they had a different look in their eyes tonight."

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