

Lady Raiders Win Sun Belt Opener 71-49

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee women's basketball (9-5, 1-0 SBC) kicked off the Sun Belt portion of its season with a 71-49 win over conference foe Arkansas-Little Rock (6-9, 0-2 SBC) Thursday in the Murphy Center.

The Lady Raiders pounded the ball inside all night and was rewarded with 42 points inside the paint and also recorded 27 points off 24 UALR turnovers. Middle Tennessee also swiped 16 steals as a team and was led by senior guard Patrice Holmes who had a season-high seven steals in the contest.

Middle Tennessee opened the game with seven consecutive points before the Lady Trojans could muster a basket. After scoring their first basket, UALR stormed back to tie the game at 12 off a jumper by Alicia Cash with 9:33 left in the

first half. The Lady Raiders answered with a jumper by junior forward Tia Stovall to take the lead back 14-12. Middle Tennessee went on a 14-7 run to close out the half and led 28-19 to end the first half.

Holmes set the tone in the second half hitting a three-point shot in the first 19 seconds of the second half. Middle Tennessee shot a scorching 64 percent from the field in the second half and shot 76.9 percent from the free throw line (10-of-13). For the game, Middle Tennessee shot 49 percent and held UALR to 35.4 percent.

Stovall led all scorers with 22 points in the game and also had three steals. Holmes and Krystle Horton followed with 12 points and Chrissy Givens added 11.



Middle Tennessee completes a seven-game home stretch when the Lady Raiders host Arkansas State in its second Sun Belt Game of the season. Tip-off is set for 2:05 p.m.

NOTES:

STOVALL SHINES IN WIN: Junior Tia Stovall enjoyed her second-best scoring game of the season when she poured in a game-high 22 points on 9-for-11 shooting against UALR. It marked the second time this season Stovall has topped the 20-point mark and the eighth time during her career. The Estill Springs, Tenn., native went over the 800-point mark for her career with the 22-point outing against UALR. Stovall now has 801 points in her three-year career.

CONFERENCE OPENERS: With the win over UALR tonight, Middle Tennessee ran its record to 3-2 all-time in Sun Belt Conference openers and is a perfect 3-0 in SBC openers played at home.

TWO IN A ROW FOR MT BENCH: For the second straight game, Middle Tennessee won the battle of the reserves as the Lady Raider bench outscored UALR, 19-4. The Lady Raiders are now 2-0 this season when outscoring the oppositions bench players. Sophomore Krystle Horton led the way for Middle Tennessee with 12 points.

PLAYER OF THE GAME: Members of the working media voted Tia Stovall the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game. Stovall finished with a game-high 22 points on 9-for-11 shooting.

STAT SHEET STUFFER: Sophomore Chrissy Givens was filling out the stat sheet Thursday night in the win over UALR. The Monroe, La., native hit double figures in scoring for the first time in five games and the fifth time this year with 11 points on 4-for-8 shooting. Givens also equaled her career-high with a team-best eight rebounds to go along with three assists and three steals.

INSIDE THE PAINT: The 71 points scored by Middle Tennessee tonight is the most by the Lady Raiders since they tallied 77 in a win over Wisconsin back on November 27 ... The Lady Raiders moved their record to 8-1 all-time against UALR and 5-0 against the Lady Trojans at home ... The Lady Raiders are now 3-0 this season on Thursday night ... Senior Patrice Holmes collected a season-high seven steals against UALR, which was just one shy of her career mark ... Freshman Lakira Boyd pulled down a career-best five rebounds in the win over UALR to go along with a personal-high four assists ... Krystle Horton netted 12 points, which was her best output since registering 19 points in a win over Austin Peay on Dec. 21.

QUOTES:

Head Coach Stephany Smith: "[UALR] was very athletic and more athletic than anticipated. They had very good strength combined with their athleticism. I was a little surprised about how we came out of the gates. At some point, we need to understand that Little Rock is not the team that they used to be. They will continue to get better and better, and they will be an unbelievably strong opponent in Little Rock."

"We mixed up our defenses a little bit. During the first eight minutes of the game, I thought things were going very poorly for us offensively. They weren't scoring a lot of points either, but I didn't think it had anything to do with the fact that we were stopping them on their end of the floor. I think they

just missed shots. I didn't think our ball pressure was very good. I didn't think we got out and denied passes very well. We switched our defense around the 12 minute mark, and I think that is when things started picking up a little bit for us."

Guard Chrissy Givens: "Personally, I didn't feel like I was doing my job early in the game. I came out and set back on the point guard instead of applying ball pressure. That threw our defense off, because if I sag off then everybody else will sag off. I am supposed to be the defensive leader, and coming out I didn't do that. We started off a little slow. This is conference, and I have to give my all. Coming out in the second half, I just tried to apply more ball pressure."

Forward Tia Stovall: "When you score inside, you have to give thanks to your guards because it starts with them. They are the ones that feed you the ball. Once they feed it to you, they expect you to score. We just took what their defense gave us."

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