Lady Raiders roll in first round with 73-30 win

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DENTON, Texas - Middle Tennessee's Lady Raiders opened defense of their Sun Belt Tournament championship in resounding fashion with a 73-30 win against New Orleans here Friday afternoon.

Middle Tennessee, seeded No. 3 in the East Division, opened the game on a 14-0 run and never looked back on its way to the easy win against the Lady Privateers, which entered as the No. 6 seed from the West Division.

"You always have to feel good when your team comes out and opens the game on an immediate run," Lady Raiders coach Stephany Smith said. "I thought we came out with a lot of focus, got everyone involved and played well. This is a nice way to start the tournament."

Middle Tennessee (20-8) assured itself of a second straight 20-win season under Smith and marked the 13th time the Lady Raiders have enjoyed a season of 20 wins or more in the program's 30-year history. All but one player on the Lady Raider roster scored in the rout, with Tia Stovall leading the way with a game-high 17 points and six rebounds. The junior forward also dished out four assists and she tied her career high of five steals.

Patrice Holmes tallied 13 points, while Chrissy Givens rounded out three players in double figures with 10 points, while also dishing out five assists. Additionally, Krystle Horton and Lakira Boyd finished with nine points each.

The Lady Raiders dominated every facet of the game and left nothing to chance after shooting 73 percent (19-of-26) in the opening half on its way to a 44-12 lead at the intermission. Middle

Tennessee shot 57 percent (30-of-53) for the game, while limiting New Orleans (2-26) to just 27 percent on 12-of-45 from the field.

As a unit, Middle Tennessee displayed tremendous court awareness as seven different players assisted on baskets. The Lady Raiders were credited with assists on 20 of their 30 field goals and they also collected 18 steals, while committing just 12 turnovers.

The Lady Raiders' largest lead of the game was a 46-point spread, 62-16, on Stovall's layup with 11:33 remaining. Middle Tennessee will face North Texas in quarterfinal action Sunday at 1:30 p.m. at the Super Pit.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE VS NEW ORLEANS FIRST ROUND, SUN BELT CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT DENTON, TX; MARCH 4, 2005

TEAM BALL: Today's SBC Tournament opening victory over UNO was a complete team effort. The Lady Raiders handed out 20 assists on 30 field goals as seven different players got in on the act, led by Chrissy Givens' five helpers. The 20 assists today equaled a season-high and the Lady Raiders have had at least 18 helpers in the last three games.

TOURNAMENT SUCCESS: With today's win, Middle Tennessee is now 8-3 all-time in SBC Tournament play and has won four in a row. Since joining the SBC, the Lady Raiders have never lost a first game in the tournament.

BIG VICTORY: Middle Tennessee's resounding 73-30 victory over UNO on Friday marked the largest margin of victory by the Lady Raiders since downing Morris Brown, 90-39, on January 28, 2002. The 43-point win over UNO marked the largest margin of victory for MT in conference tournament play all-time besting the previous mark of 31 points set against ULL in 2002.

MT SETS STEALS RECORD: With 18 steals tonight, Middle Tennessee ran its season total to 368 to set a new single-season record. The previous mark was 367 established by the 2003-04 team. Tia Stovall and Krystle Horton led the theft charge with a combined nine.

DEFENSE: The key to Middle Tennessee's opening round tournament win came on the defensive end of the court. The Lady Raiders held UNO to just 30 total points, which is the fewest allowed by a team in the history of the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. It was also the fewest given up by the Lady Raiders since holding UALR to 29 points on January 11, 2003. Also defensively, Middle Tennessee forced 29 turnovers and held UNO to just 26.7 percent shooting from the field.

STOVALL COMES UP BIG: Junior Tia Stovall, who has earned all-tournament honors twice, poured in a career tournament high 17 points in the win over UNO. Stovall also added six rebounds, four assists and five steals in just 23 minutes of action. Over her last six games, Stovall is shooting an impressive 62.1 (41-66) percent from the field.

IN THE PAINT: Assistant Coach Drew Clinton flew home early today to join his wife, Kelley, in the birth of their girl, Nora Dean. Nora Dean was 8 pounds and 12 ounces ... The win today ran the Lady Raiders record to 20-8 to mark their 13th 20-win season in school history ... Sara Nuxol played a career-high 11 minutes vs UNO ... Tia Stovall equaled her career-high with five steals in the win over UNO ... The Lady Raiders have won their last two SBC Tournament games by a combined 65 points ... Lakira Boyd was successful in her SBC Tournament debut by scoring nine points and equaling

her personal-best with five rebounds ... Patrice Holmes has now played in a school record 119 career games and counting ... The win over UNO was the 149th of Stephany Smith's career and she needs just one more to reach the 150-win plateau.

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