Lady Raiders Goin' Dancin', Defeat ULL in SBC Finals to earn automatic bid

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DENTON, Texas - Middle Tennessee is Goin' Dancin' for a second straight year.

The Lady Raiders (23-8) punched their ticket to the NCAA Tournament on Tuesday by earning the Sun Belt Conference's automatic bid by defeating Louisiana-Lafayette, 67-52, in the championship game of the SBC Tournament. This marks the Lady Raiders' second straight tournament championship and the eighth conference tournament title in school history.

"You will have to forgive me for not being overly excited right now," Head Coach Stephany Smith said. "It has been a long and adverse filled season and it will take time to reflect. This team has been through a lot and is very deserving. We put together a great tournament and achieved one of our goals. I am glad we are still playing and can't wait to get to the tournament."

The Lady Raiders will continue their play the weekend of March 19 in the NCAA Tournament. It will be the team's 10th appearance in school history and Middle Tennessee will find out where they go and who they play on Sunday, March 13, during the 'Selection Sunday' Show that airs at 4 PM CST.

Middle Tennessee placed all five starters in double figures and was led by Chrissy Givens' 18 points (tied career-best). Patrice Holmes, who earned the Most Outstanding Player award for an SBC record third straight time, added 14 points, eight rebounds and three steals. Krystle Horton registered 12 points, Ciara Gray added 11 points, and Tia Stovall turned in 10 points.

Along with Holmes, Stovall and Givens were voted to the all-tournament team. It marks the third straight year Stovall has been selected to the squad.

ULL came out the second half and managed to cut the Lady Raider lead to 10 points at 39-29 with 15:47 to play, but that would be as close as the Ragin' Cajuns would get. Middle Tennessee

answered with a 7-0 lead to stretch the lead back to 17 points and was never seriously threatened again.

"I am so proud of this team because today's game was just like the last two, a team win," Smith added. "If you had told me back in October I would be sitting here today I would have said you are probably right, but as the season went on and we lost players and got struck with adversity I would not be so sure. It's just a testament to this team's character."

Middle Tennessee and Louisiana-Lafayette began the game in a nip and tuck battle for the first five minutes, then the Lady Raiders put together a 12-0 run to take a 22-9 lead with 9:31 remaining. With some suffocating defense, the Lady Raiders kept their margin all the way to halftime by holding the Ragin' Cajuns to just 30.4 percent shooting from the field.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE VS LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME, SUN BELT CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT DENTON, TX; MARCH 8, 2005

NO. 8: Middle Tennessee's win over Louisiana-Lafayette today marked the programs second straight Sun Belt Conference Tournament Championship and the eighth tournament title in school history. The Lady Raiders also won tournament championships in the Ohio Valley Conference in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, and 1998.

BACK IN THE SHOW: With the Sun Belt Conference's automatic bid, Middle Tennessee will be making its ninth appearance into the NCAA Tournament and the third under Head Coach Stephany Smith. The Lady Raiders made history in last year's field of 64 by upsetting 12th ranked North Carolina in the opening round, 67-62. It marked just the third time in the history of the NCAA Tournament that a 13 seed defeated a No. 4 seed. Overall, Middle Tennessee has a mark of 3-8 in the NCAA Tournament with appearances in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1996, 1998, 2004 and now in 2005.

SELECTION SUNDAY: The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team will be at Corky's Barbecue Restaurant for 'Selection Sunday' on March 13 to learn where and when they will play in the 2005 NCAA Tournament. Fans and friends are encouraged to join the team and take part in the festivities. The Lady Raiders will arrive at approximately 3:30 p.m. for the 4 p.m. selection show on ESPN. "It's an exciting moment for our program, the university and the community," said head coach Stephany Smith. "We are looking forward to sharing this moment with all the fans and would like to thank Henry Huddleston of Corky's Barbecue for hosting the event." Middle Tennessee cheerleaders and Lightning will be on hand to cheer the Lady Raider on. The Lady Raiders earned a ticket to the NCAA Tournament with a 67-52 win over Louisiana-Lafayette in the Sun Belt Tournament Championship. It will be the second trip to the "Big Dance" in a row for Middle Tennessee and the 10th time in school history.

THREE FOR HOLMES: For the third year in a row, Middle Tennessee's Patrice Holmes was voted the Sun Belt Conference Tournament's Most Outstanding Player. Holmes finished this year's tourney with 72 points, 28 rebounds, 10 steals, and shot 47.6 (30-63) percent from the field. Holmes is the first player in Sun Belt history to win the award three times.

BLUE RAIDERS IN THE SBC TOURNEY: Middle Tennessee sports a 11-3 mark in five Sun Belt Tournaments, including a 9-1 mark over the past three seasons. The Lady Raiders have reached the tournament championship game the past three years, claiming the automatic berth into the NCAA

Tournament in 2004 and 2005. Middle Tennessee has won at least one game in all five SBC Tournament appearances, and sports a 41-27 all-time conference tournament record.

HOLMES MOVES UP SBC LIST: With 14 points in today's championship game, senior Patrice Holmes tied Julie Hagood (Arkansas State) for sixth place on the Sun Belt Conference's all-time scoring list. Holmes now has 1,840 career points and stands 65 points back of Kristin Wilson (UNCC) for fifth place.

STOVALL JOINS 1,000-POINT CLUB: Junior Tia Stovall became the 17th player in school history to amass 1,000 career points when she pumped in 10 points against ULL in the SBC finals. Stovall now has 1,008 career points to join teammate Patrice Holmes as members to the elite club.

GIVENS TIES CAREER-HIGH: Sophomore Chrissy Givens saved one her best games as Lady Raider for the SBC Championship game. The Monroe, La., native equaled her career-high with 18 points on 8 of 13 shooting. Her eight field goals also tied a personal-best. Givens also added five rebounds, three assists, three steals, and only had one turnover.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER: Middle Tennessee freshman Lakira Boyd will now be doing something her father did - playing in the NCAA Tournament. Dwight Boyd, who was in the NCAA Tournament three times in his four years with the University of Memphis, was in attendance today to see his daughter and the Lady Raiders advance to the 'Big Dance' by defeating ULL in the SBC Championship game. Boyd played at Memphis from 1984 to 1988 and made one appearance in the Final Four (1985).

HOLMES IN SBC PLAY: Senior Patrice Holmes, a two-time winner of the league's Most Outstanding Tournament Player award, has scored 20 or more points in SBC tournament action six times in 12 games. Overall, Holmes is averaging 19.0 points and 8.0 rebounds all-time in the SBC Tournament. The Bishopville, S.C., native topped the 20-point mark twice in this year's tourney.

GIVENS HAS SOLID TOURNAMENT: Sophomore Chrissy Givens put together a great tournament for the Lady Raiders. In four games, Givens scored 49 points, grabbed 20 rebounds and made 19 of 34 field goals (.559). She also collected 10 steals.

HOLMES PASSES MCFALL: With 14 points today, senior Patrice Holmes moved past Jennifer McFall for sixth place on Middle Tennessee's all-time scoring list. Holmes now has 1,840 career points and is well back of No. 5 Jamie Thomatis (1,943).

IN THE PAINT: Patrice Holmes' 29 field goals in this week's Sun Belt Conference Tournament is a new SBC tourney record (broke previous mark of 28 field goals) ... Middle Tennessee recorded a season-low 10 turnovers in the win over ULL ... With four wins in this year's SBC Tournament, Middle Tennessee became the first team to win four games in the tournament in the league's history ... Ciara Gray scored in double figures for the third time this season ... Middle Tennessee shot a sizzling 86.0 percent (37-43) from the free throw line during the SBC Tournament.

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