Blue Raiders rally for win behind second half scoring surge

MT nets four goals in final 45 minutes

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LAFAYETTE, La. - Middle Tennessee found itself down at the half, but four goals during the second period lifted the Blue Raider soccer team to a 4-2 victory at Louisiana Sunday afternoon in Lafayette, La. It marked only the second time this season MT trailed at intermission. The only other game in which it happened was at Dayton August 30.

"I am really proud of how this team responded after being down at the half," head coach Aston Rhoden. "Overall, it was a great team win. Getting a victory like we did today gives us confidence as we head into next weekend against two very solid opponents."

The Blue Raiders found themselves in a 2-0 hole during the opening 45 minutes as host Louisiana (1-14-1, 1-7 Sun Belt) built a cushion with a pair of goals five minutes apart. Kelli Jestes got the scoring started at 17:16 on an assist from Kennedy Richards.

Richards nearly added one of her own, but Middle Tennessee goalie Rebecca Cushing denied her attempt. A loose ball ensued after the save and the Ragin' Cajuns' Jordan Blevins was able to put a foot on it and find the back of the net at 22:18 for the 2-0 advantage. Louisiana was able to take the two-goal edge, and 9-to-7 shot advantage, into the intermission.

The second half, however, belonged to visiting Middle Tennessee with the Blue Raiders controlling the shots, 12-to-3. Senior Jen Threlkeld cut the deficit in half when she scored off an assist from junior Vanessa Mueggler at 58:20.

The team's leading scorer, sophomore Shan Jones, then netted the equalizer at 70:08 after Threlkeld fed her for a one-on-one opportunity with Louisiana's keeper, Dani Presley.

Fellow sophomore Hope Suominen put Middle Tennessee (12-3-1, 6-2 Sun Belt) on top when her free kick from just outside the 18-yard box slipped past the defense at 78:18.

Threlkeld then put the final touches on the scoring when she headed in a free kick cross from freshman Allison Stallard at 84:57.

The Blue Raiders maintain the second-best start in school history with their 12-3-1 record, trailing only the 14-2 opening by the 2006 squad. Jones' goal matches her season total, 11, from a year ago when she was selected as the Sun Belt Freshman of the Year.

Three different players have now reached the 20-point barrier, led by Jones' 25. Mueggler has added 22 points, while Threlkeld has contributed 20 on the campaign.

Middle Tennessee will return to action at 7 p.m. Friday when it plays host to Sun Belt leader North Texas at the Dean A. Hayes Track and Soccer Stadium. The Blue Raiders will also welcome Denver to town for a 1 p.m. Sunday match in the final home contest of the season.

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