No place like home: Blue Raiders return to winning ways in 3-0 shutout of FIU

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee returned home to regain its scoring prowess and secure its first Sun Belt Conference win of the season with an impressive 3-0 shutout of Florida International at Blue Raider Field Friday afternoon. After combining for four goals in its three previous league matches on the road, Middle Tennessee (7-4-2, 1-1-2) exploded for three second-half goals, provided by three different Blue Raiders, to secure victory against the always-tough Golden Panthers (3-6-4, 1-3-1). Ingrid Christensen, Claire Ward and Kala Morgan all found the back of the net in the Blue Raider win. Morgan also accounted for an assist. "This is a win we needed," Middle Tennessee coach Aston Rhoden said. "It was nice to be back home and our fans were great again today. I thought our players played hard and it's probably the best 90 minutes of soccer they have put together all season. This is what we were waiting for and Florida International is a very good team. I just think we did a nice job sticking with our game plan, and it paid off for us." Middle Tennessee won its seventh straight Sun Belt home match and registered its fifth shutout of the season, but the scoring punch that had been dormant in recent matches finally resurfaced and that was the big story on Friday. The hard-fought and physical match was scoreless at the half, but the Blue Raiders wasted little time getting on the scoreboard after intermission when Christensen scored her first career goal on a

header from 5 yards out. Kala Morgan and Rachel Holmes assisted on the score as Middle Tennessee went on top 1-0 in the 48th minute. The Blue Raiders weren't finished; however, as they quickly struck again in the 56th minute when Ward scored her first goal of the season. Nenita Burgess rifled a pass through two Florida International defenders and Ward rifled it past keeper Madeline Gannon to give Middle Tennessee a 2-0 lead. The final margin was provided in the 71st minute when Katy Rayburn delivered a perfectly executed pass off a free kick, dropping it over a collection of Golden Panther defenders, and then Morgan headed it into the goal for her sixth score of the season to complete the picture-perfect play. "It feels great to get a win in conference play and take a step in the right direction," Ward said. "I think everyone came out in the right frame of mind and we all worked together. That's how we got the win. We did a lot better today finishing our chances." While the Middle Tennessee offense got untracked, the defense continued to sparkle. Middle Tennessee allowed just four shots in the game, and only one in the second half. Florida International had no corner kicks and keeper Danielle Perreault saved the only legitimate threat the Golden Panthers sent her way. The Blue Raiders return to action when they play host to Louisiana-Lafayette in at Blue Raider Field Sunday at 1 p.m.

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