Blue Raiders Defeat UALR in Final Home Game of the Year

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Coming into the game on Saturday, Middle Tennessee women's basketball had lost just two Sun Belt games this season, and one of them was to Arkansas-Little Rock (12-13, 4-8 SBC). The Blue Raiders didn't have revenge on their minds when they faced the Trojans, the team was just looking for a win and momentum going into their last two road games of the season. Middle Tennessee got both with a 65-58 victory in front of a crowd of 2,011 in the Murphy Center.

- **Photos:** MT vs. UALR Gallery

  The Blue Raiders improve to 17-8 on the season and more importantly climb to 10-2 in the Sun Belt. The win tonight gives the Blue Raiders the lead in the Sun Belt East.

  It was an emotional night for lone senior Tia Stovall as she was honored prior to the game. The festivities of the last home game of the year also included Chrissy Givens receiving a game ball for scoring 1,000 points in her career.

  Givens promptly responded by scoring the first nine points for the Blue Raiders to start the game. After a fast start, Middle Tennessee cooled down both in shooting and on the boards. Givens, who has been used to scoring at will, was held to 21 points thanks to the adept guarding by Arkansas-Little Rock's Jocelyn Love.

The Blue Raiders had an off night shooting after the hot hands the team enjoyed in the previous two games. Middle Tennessee was held to just 38.1 percent from the field and was out-rebounded by 11 (39-28). Though the shooting was frosty, the Blue Raiders still found their scoring touch thanks to their defense. Middle Tennessee forced 28 UALR turnovers and scored 22 points off Trojan miscues.

Middle Tennessee built a 13-point lead in the first half, after Givens hit a jumper to put the Blue Raiders up 25-12 with 9:30 left. UALR would not be put away, however, and cut Middle Tennessee's lead to single digits four times before Johnna Abney hit a three-pointer with 51 seconds left in the half to give the Blue Raiders a 12-point advantage heading into the locker room.

Arkansas-Little Rock tried to battle back in the second half, and had Middle Tennessee on its heels with 12:28 remaining as the Trojans cut the lead to eight, 44-36. A pair of free throws by Krystle Horton pushed the lead back into double digits however, UALR was far from sedated.

Arkansas-Little Rock cut the Blue Raider lead down to seven when Love hit a three-pointer with 7:23 left. The Blue Raiders got a huge boost when they came back down the court and Abney drained back-to-back three-pointers to push the Middle Tennessee lead to 13.

Horton was the only other Blue Raider to score in double digits with 10 points. She also had four steals in the game and two assists.

Middle Tennessee will enjoy a week off from playing before the squad travels to Western Kentucky on Saturday February 25. Tip-off is set for 3:30 p.m. in E.A. Diddle Arena.

NOTES:

REGULAR SEASON HOME FINALE'S: With the win over Arkansas-Little Rock on Saturday night Middle Tennessee has now won its final regular season home game an amazing 25 straight years. The last time the Blue Raiders lost a regular season home finale was on Feb. 19, 1981 against Western Kentucky. Overall, Middle Tennessee has a mark of 30-1 in final regular season home games.

STREAK CONTINUES: Middle Tennessee's Sun Belt Conference home-game winning streak remained in tact Saturday night with the victory over Arkansa-Little Rock. The Blue Raiders have now won 18 straight games at the Murphy Center against Sun Belt competition. The last time Middle Tennessee dropped a home game in league play was on Feb. 5, 2004 in double overtime against Western Kentucky.

LONELY SENIOR NIGHT: It was senior night for the Middle Tennessee women's program on Saturday night, but only one upper classmen was honored. Senior Tia Stovall, out of Estill Springs, Tenn., played her final regular season home game as a Blue Raider in the win over Arkansas-Little Rock and finished with six points and five rebounds. Unlike the previous 19 seasons, Stovall will have a chance to play in the Murphy Center again as the school hosts the Sun Belt Conference Tournament on March 2-7.

GIVENS IN TOP TEN: Junior Chrissy Givens, who is making a strong case for SBC Player of

the Year, moved into the top 10 on Middle Tennessee's single-season scoring list with her effort on Saturday night. With 21 points against UALR, Givens ran her season total to 547 points to surpass Holly Hoover for 10th (546). Givens needs four more points to move past Kim Webb for ninth place and 16 more points to take over seventh place from Sharon McClanahan (563).

PLAYER OF THE GAME: Chrissy Givens was voted the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game against Arkansas-Little Rock by members of the working media.

TIDBITS: The Blue Raiders have forced 59 turnovers the last two games combined ... Former Blue Raider Patrice Holmes was in the stands tonight to cheer on her former teammates ... Chrissy Givens has now scored 20 or more points in 12 straight home games ... The Blue Raiders have won nine in a row at the Murphy Center ... Krystle Horton equaled her season-high with four steals tonight against UALR ... With 10 points tonight, Krystle Horton scored in double figures for the 60th time in her career.

QUOTES:

HEAD COACH RICK INSELL:

Thoughts on the performance of the Blue Raiders against Arkansas-Little Rock:
"It wasn't one of our best games of the year at home, but it's a win and we will take it. I thought the big play of the game was when Johnna Abney stripped the ball and gave it to Chrissy, who gave it to LaCondra for a lay-up. Then she hit two big threes, which really helped us gain momentum for the rest of the game."

On being undefeated at home against Sun Belt Conference opponents:
"One of our goals this year was to go undefeated at home in the conference, and we have done that. We wanted it to be in our hands when went to Florida International and Western Kentucky. We are playing the top two teams in the conference, besides us."

On thoughts about rebounding tonight against Arkansas-Little Rock:
"They are athletic, and they go to the boards hard. They out rebounded us. We did a poor job grabbing the balls from the glass. We didn't execute real well, we tried some things, next thing you know we can't put the ball in the hole. When we tried something new it kind of broke our momentum. Johnna did a great job, the two threes she made late and her steal where the key plays as far as I am concerned.
Chrissy had her hands full tonight. She had to come down and do our thing on our end. I'm proud of my ladies, we didn't execute real well be we did what we had to do to win. We have played a good couple of games and now we are going to take a few days off and prepare for Western Kentucky."

About creating 58 turnovers in the past two games:
"We have been working hard on our press and pressure. We had the up-tempo in this game. Last time we played them, we couldn't pressure Little Rock. Pressuring them late caused them a few problems. We got to the point we had 28 turnovers and 6 steals. We didn't do a good job on converting turnovers. We should have had at least 14 or 16 points on our side that we

didn't get."

GUARD CHRISSY GIVENS

On guarding Arkansas-Little Rock Guard Jocelyn Love:
"We matched up height wise, quickness wise, ball handling, shooting, and moving off screens. She is probably the best player I have guarded in the conference. We battled the entire game. She guarded me well and I guarded her well. I think it was a good challenge."

About going undefeated in the Sun Belt Conference at home:
"I think it's a big boost because everybody knows they have to come here to play us in the conference tournament. I liked the way we have been undefeated at home."

GUARD JOHNNA ABNEY

Thoughts on making a couple of crucial three pointers in the second half:
"Coach always says to play our game. Every time I'm open, I'm going to take the shot. I would get in trouble if I didn't take it."

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