Blue Raiders Fall to WKU; Will Be No. 2 Seed in Tourney

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee women's basketball (17-9, 10-3 SBC) fell to Western Kentucky (22-5, 12-2 SBC) 70-63 Saturday in E.A. Diddle Arena.

- **Photos:** MT vs. Western Kentucky Gallery

With the loss, the Blue Raiders will end the season as No. 2 in the Sun Belt East even though the squad still has to play at Florida International on Monday. The No. 2 finish is the highest the Blue Raiders have finished since joining the Sun Belt Conference. Middle Tennessee will also be the No. 2 seed in the Sun Belt Tournament and will receive a first-round bye not having to play until Saturday, March 4.

Middle Tennessee had its chances to win the game. After seven ties in the second half, the Blue Raiders were up by one, 60-59, with 4:27 left to go. The Blue Raiders had a chance to extend the lead when Starr Orr got a steal, but junior guard Chrissy Givens missed a lay-up and Western Kentucky's Tiffany Porter-Talbert pulled down the rebound. The Hilltoppers Dominique Duck hit a lay-up to put WKU up by one.

Out of the final media timeout, Tia Stovall fouled Duck and she hit one of two free throws to give Western Kentucky the two-point lead, 62-60. Middle Tennessee had two chances at the three minute mark but missed a three-point try and a lay-up to give the ball back to the Hilltoppers. Western Kentucky took advantage with a 4-0 run to build the lead to 66-60 with 1:47 remaining.

The Blue Raiders go a three-pointer by LaCondra Mason with 33 seconds remaining to cut the lead to four, but Crystal Kelly hit one of two free throws to put the game out of reach 68-63. Western Kentucky would get a pair of free throws from Ashley Butler with 21 seconds left to close out the game.

Middle Tennessee hurt itself at the free throw line by just converting 13-of-22 from the charity stripe. The Blue Raiders were also limited in second chance baskets as the club had 16 defensive rebounds and the Hilltoppers had 22. Middle Tennessee was out-rebounded in the game by 13, 45 to 32.

In the battle between the two top Sun Belt Player of the Year candidates, most would say it was a push. Givens ended the contest with 20 points, six rebounds and four assists, playing the full 40 minutes. Kelly had 19 points, 13 rebounds and played 37 minutes.

The Blue Raiders also had solid play from Mason who hit three 3-pointers and ended the contest with 11 points. Lone senior Stovall had seven points and eight rebounds.

Middle Tennessee will try and bounce back from its loss when the Blue Raiders close out the regular season at Florida International on Monday. The can equal its best Sun Belt record of 11-3 which it also recorded in the 2004-05 season with a win in Miami.

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