

Blue Raiders Advance to Sun Belt Championship Game

March 6, 2006 · MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee women's basketball will make its fourth straight appearance in the Sun Belt Championship game after a 90-64 win over Arkansas State (15-15) Monday in the semifinals of the Aeropostale Sun Belt Conference Tournament held in Murphy Center.

- **Video:** [MT vs. Arkansas State](#)

The Blue Raiders, who are the No. 2 seed from the East, defeated No. 4 seed Arkansas State for the third time this season. Middle Tennessee improves to 19-10 on the year and one more win would assure the club its third straight 20-win season.



Middle Tennessee and Arkansas State started the game by trading baskets for the first 13 minutes of the game with nine ties in the contest. Arkansas State took a brief lead, 26-25, but Tia Stovall answered with a jumper to give the Blue Raiders back the lead, 27-26. Middle Tennessee went on a 12-6 run to close out the first half and never trailed again.

Middle Tennessee continued its stifling pressure in the second half and seemed to hit every shot it took. In the second half alone, the Blue Raiders were 16-of-23 from the field for 69.6 percent and was also 7-of-10 from behind the arch.

The Blue Raiders shot a scorching 59.3 percent from the field, which was a season high for the club, and also shot the lights out from behind the three-point arch for 52.4 percent. The 11 three-pointers made by the Blue Raiders are the second-most this season.

In an afternoon when Sun Belt Player of the Year Chrissy Givens didn't score her typical 20-plus points, the Blue Raiders had numerous other players step up. The remaining two-thirds of the triple threat for the club, Krystle Horton and Tia Stovall, each had huge games for Middle Tennessee.

Horton scored 24 points for Middle Tennessee, two shy of her season-high, and also led the Blue Raiders with four steals. Stovall also led the charge for the Blue Raiders by scoring 10 of her 16 points in the second half and also had five rebounds and two steals.

Perhaps the biggest lift in the game was the perimeter shooting of freshmen tandem of Johnna Abney and LaCondra Mason. Just when Arkansas State tried to make a run at the Blue Raiders either Abney or Mason had an answer from behind the 3-point line. The dynamic duo combined for eight of the Blue Raiders 11 treys in the game. Abney ended the game with 18 points and Mason had 12.

Givens, who was held to 11 points in the game, earned a less conventional double-double. She also dished out 10 assists for the Blue Raiders.

Middle Tennessee will play in the finals of the Sun Belt Championships at 3 p.m. in the Murphy Center against Western Kentucky. The game will be televised on ESPN+ and locally on CSS.

NOTES:

STOVALL IN ELITE COMPANY: With the win today, senior Tia Stovall becomes the first player in Blue Raider history to reach the finals of a conference tournament four years in a row.

HORTON STEPPING UP: Junior Krystle Horton has stepped up her play in the postseason. Horton entered the SBC Tournament averaging 11.6 points per game, but is averaging 19.5 points in the two tournament wins this year after scoring a career postseason high 24 points in the win over ASU. Overall, Horton has scored in double figures seven times in nine SBC Tournament games during her career including four in a row.

STREAK STOPPED: Junior Chrissy Givens entered the Arkansas State game having scored 20 or more points in 13 straight games at home. That streak was stopped today after the Indians held Givens to 11 points.

LILL ABNEY CORNER: Johnna Abney's 18 points marked her most in a game since scoring a career-high 20 against Troy back on Jan. 21.

BALANCED ATTACK: Middle Tennessee used a balanced attack in the win over ASU as all five starters scored in double figures led by Horton's 24 points.

TIDBITS: Middle Tennessee has now won nine straight Sun Belt Conference Tournament games since 2003, the Blue Raiders are a combined 11-1 in SBC Tourney action ... Middle Tennessee has now advanced to the finals of the SBC Tournament four years in a row ... With a victory in the finals, Middle Tennessee would pick up its 20th victory for the third straight year ... Middle Tennessee won its 20th straight game against a conference opponent at home

with the win over ASU. The last setback to a league member came against Western Kentucky on Feb. 5, 2004 in double overtime ... Freshman LaCondra Mason has now hit at least one three-pointer in seven straight games ... Despite scoring just 11 points, junior Chrissy Givens dished out a career-best 10 assists in the win over ASU ... Middle Tennessee's 11 made three-pointers marked the second most by the team this season. MT hit 12 in a win at New Orleans.

QUOTES:

Head Coach Rick Insell

Opening Statement: "I am very proud of the Lady Raiders. They came out in the second half and played hard and with a lot of passion. We were very aggressive. We went to the boards. Most of all, we knocked our shots down. When we do that, we are very tough to beat. We had a few times during the game when we had to check ourselves. But, we were able to step up and hit big shots."

"You can't coach saying shoot, shoot, shoot. And, the first time they shoot you jerk them out of the game. We have taken some bad shots this year. But, they know that if they have a look, they have the freedom to let it go. Shooters are very tedious when you start messing with their minds. The best way to handle that is to just not mess with their minds. Just tell them to shoot and go on. As long as they give an effort on the defensive end, that is what we are looking for."

"[Tia Stovall and Krystle Horton] have been valuable all year. They have been great examples in the classroom. Tia graduated in three years. Krystle is an Academic All-American. I have been very fortunate to come on board and have three great players there for our young players to look at. They know how to act on and off the court. What these two young ladies have done this year will be with us for the next 10 or 12 years."

Forward Tia Stovall

"From a player's perspective, once the game gets flowing and everything is going your way, it is impossible to stop team flow like that. We were very enthusiastic. People were making good drives and kicks. When you make a good pass, they are bound to knock down the shot. Our team chemistry was just really great in the second half."

"A win is a team win. Chrissy [Givens] may score a lot of points, but she also gets assists and rebounds. A win is a team effort. Chrissy gets a lot of hype, but she doesn't let it go to her head. That just shows she is a team player. We are going to be there for her just like she is going to be there for us."

Krystle Horton

"I felt we had a great all around game. Everyone was prepared and focused for the game. We knew what was in store and what was waiting for us. We knew that Arkansas State wasn't going to give up, and we knew they were going to fight us to the end. We just had to come out and play hard. We had to play with our hearts and be aggressive."

"Chrissy [Givens] does go out and score a lot of points. But, we are behind her all the way."

She is so humble about it. We do the dirty work behind the scenes. We know that without Chrissy, we probably wouldn't be here right now. We have to give a great team effort every game."

Printed on July 30, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/4932>