

# Blue Raiders Going Dancin' Again; Win Third Straight SBC Tournament Title

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**MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -** Middle Tennessee women's basketball (20-10) won its third straight Sun Belt Conference Tournament title with an 84-73 win over Western Kentucky (24-6) Tuesday in the Murphy Center.

- **Video:** [MT vs. WKU Highlights](#)
- **Photos:** [MT vs. WKU Gallery One](#)
- **Photos:** [MT vs. WKU Gallery Two](#)

The Blue Raiders overcame a 14-point deficit in the first half to pull off the victory. Middle Tennessee's title hopes looked in jeopardy when Western Kentucky opened the game with a 15-2 run. Tia Stovall's lay-up almost three minutes into the game was the lone offense threat

Middle Tennessee could muster as the Lady Toppers had the Blue Raiders on their heels.

Junior guard Chrissy Givens, who would be named Sun Belt Tournament MVP, broke the Blue Raider scoring drought when she hit a pair of free throws with 13:40 left to make the score 15-4.

Down by double digits for the first ten minutes of the game, Middle Tennessee cut the lead to eight when Starr Orr hit a three pointer from the right side to cut Western Kentucky's advantage to eight, 23-15.

Givens hit a pair of free throws with 2:14 left to trim the Western Kentucky lead to one, 35-34,



and Middle Tennessee took its first lead of the contest when Tia Stovall hit a jumper and was fouled. She hit her free throw putting the Blue Raiders up by two with 1:10 left. Western Kentucky tied the game off a bucket by Tiffany Porter-Talbert but Givens gave the Blue Raiders the lead back when she answered with a jumper of her own.

Western Kentucky tied the game, 39-39, going into the locker room off a jumper by Krystal Gardner with two seconds left on the clock.

It is said everyone has an opportunity in life to prove themselves, and that moment was the second half for sophomore guard Monique Martin. After spending the first two tournament games on the bench, Martin got the call from Head Coach Rick Insell in the second half of the Sun Belt Conference title game to step up and make plays for her team.

Martin got the starting nod in the second half over freshman LaCondra Mason and she responded by sparking the Blue Raiders from the first moment she stepped onto the court. Martin hit a jumper six seconds into the game in route to a 15-point performance and was a catalyst for the Blue Raiders in the win. Martin scored her 15 points in just 13 minutes of playing time and also pulled down three rebounds and had one key steal.

After Middle Tennessee took the lead in the second half, thanks to Martin's bucket, the Blue Raiders never trailed in the game again. Western Kentucky pulled within one point six times, but Martin's huge three-pointer with 12:38 remaining seemed to be the final sounding bell for Western Kentucky.

Middle Tennessee's largest lead of the game was 15 after Krystle Horton hit a pair of free throws with 6:26 left. Western Kentucky trimmed the Blue Raider lead to nine when Krystal Kelly hit a lay-up at the 3:19 minute mark, but it was an offensive threat that was too little too late.

Western Kentucky won the battle under the basket scoring 36 points in the paint to Middle Tennessee's 28. After pulling down just 11 rebounds in the first half, Middle Tennessee ripped down key rebounds in the second half and ended the game with.

Middle Tennessee also forced 20 Western Kentucky turnovers and scored 20 points off Lady Topper miscues. Western Kentucky forced Middle Tennessee to turn the ball over 19 times but only scored 10 points off the Blue Raider turnovers.

Givens ended the game with her fourth double-double of the season with 24 points and 12 rebounds. She also was a perfect 12-of-12 from the free throw line. The Sun Belt Player of the Year and Sun Belt Tournament MVP averaged 23.1 points per game in the tournament and scored 71 points in three games. Givens was just three points shy of tying the Sun Belt Tournament record for most points in a tournament which was set by former teammate Patrice Holmes in 2003.

Stovall, who had another solid outing for the Blue Raiders, was named to the Sun Belt All-Tournament team for her efforts. She ended the game with 19 points and also had three steals.

Starr Orr added 11 points for Middle Tennessee and was also 6-of-6 from the charity stripe.

Krystle Horton rounded out the scoring with 10 points.

Middle Tennessee will have to wait until Monday, March 13 to learn its fate on where it will be sent in the NCAA Tournament. The Middle Tennessee athletic department is planning a selection show for the Blue Raiders and will announce details later in the week.

### **All-Tournament Team**

1. Lasma Jekabsone (Jr., C, FIU) 2. Tiffany Porter-Talbert (Sr., G, WKU) 3. Crystal Kelly (So., F, WKU) 4. Adrienne Davie (Jr., C, ASU) 5. **Tia Stovall (Sr., F, MT)**

**Most Outstanding Player: Chrissy Givens (Jr., G, MT)**

### **NOTES:**

**RARE AIR:** Junior Chrissy Givens became just the second player in the history of the Sun Belt Conference to win Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year, and Tournament Most Outstanding Player awards in the same season. The other SBC player to accomplish this feat was Louisiana Tech's Amanda Wilson in 1998 ... Junior Chrissy Givens hit the 20-point mark for the 20th time this season.

**THE MICROWAVE:** Sophomore Monique Martin, who entered play today average 5.0 points a game in eight minutes of play per contest, turned it on at the most opportune time today. Martin, who's career-high is 18 points, played just two total minutes in the tournament before starting the second half against WKU. The Thomson, Ga., native lit up the Hilltoppers with 15 points in the final 20 minutes to key the Blue Raider victory. It marked just her fifth double figure scoring game of the season. **THREE-PEAT:** Middle Tennessee joined an elite group today by winning its third straight Sun Belt Conference Tournament Championship. The Blue Raiders join Old Dominion (1983-85), Western Kentucky (1991-93) and Louisiana Tech (1996-2001) as the only programs to win three straight SBC Women's Tournament titles.

**INSELL GETS ANOTHER TITLE:** First-year head coach Rick Insell won 10 state high school championships in the Murphy Center and today he picked up an SBC Tournament title on the same floor.

**TIDBITS:** Chrissy Givens flirted with her first career triple-double today in the win over WKU. The junior tallied a game-high 24 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and handed out seven assists ... Senior Tia Stovall, who has now played in four straight SBC Championship games, equaled her season-high with nine made field goals en route to a 19-point effort. It was her 14th double figure scoring game of the year and her second in three tournament games ... For the second straight game, Middle Tennessee placed five players in double figures for points ... Junior Krystle Horton averaged 16.3 points, 5.7 rebounds, and shot 52.7 percent from the field in the three tournament games ... In its last two games, Middle Tennessee has shot a combined 57.5 percent from the field (61-106) ... Middle Tennessee won its third straight Sun Belt Conference Tournament title today with the win over WKU and advances to the prestigious NCAA Tournament for the third straight year ... This marks just the second time in school history the Blue Raiders have advanced to the NCAA's three years in a row ... The Blue Raiders have now won 11 straight SBC Tournament games.

## QUOTES:

### Head Coach Rick Insell

**Opening Statement:** "I've never felt like this. When I coached on the high school level the whole game was stressful. I just never quit believing in my young ladies. I knew when we got down 16 points that we were OK. I told the young ladies in the timeout that the game was not over and we had plenty of time to get back in this game and they believed me. They looked me in the eyes. I looked them in the eyes, and I knew it.

"We went with a different offense that put the ball in Chrissy's hands and she took it over, started breaking them down, put the pressure on them, which allowed us to do some other things."

### **What does this win mean here for you today, taking your team to your first NCAA**

**Tournament?:** "The win was big for a lot of things. It was big for me and my family. There's high school coaches all over the country who has been passed over and have not been given opportunities who are deserving, maybe even more deserving than me. When Dr. McPhee and Chris Massaro took a chance and hired me at Middle Tennessee it kind of opened the door for all of them also. With the success we have had this year and now going to the NCAA Tournament I think some more athletic directors across the country will look at some of these people, male and female, that are great coaches at that level and bring them into the collegiate game."

### Guard Chrissy Givens

"All year, Coach[Rick] Insell has been telling us about not going out there and playing the crowd or the scoreboard. We went out there and we played Lady Raider basketball. They jumped out on us and we came back and kept going. A mountain was put in front of us and we climbed over it. That's pretty much how it's been all season and when you go all season like that and get down, you never lose hope. It was just another game for us."

**Talk about the balance scoring:** "It is not a secret where the offense is going. Everyone knows it is going through me. I'm trying to get everybody else to pull off and stop me from getting into the paint and then dish. I got a lot of assists because everyone was pulling off and (Stovall and Krystle Horton) were getting layups, and-ones. It was just a team effort. If you stop me it's not like I'm the only scorer. We have four other girls who can score on the court at one time. We have three 1,000-point scorers in Tia, Krystle and myself. Starr Orr, 4,500 points in her high school career, Johnna Abney is probably the best 3-point shooter in our league, and as you all saw today, Monique Martin came in today. When we all come together like that it's awesome."

### Forward Tia Stovall

**What did Monique bring to the team in the second half?:** "She brought a lot of energy. She carried herself very well. Her body language showed that she had confidence in herself and confidence that she was going to help this team. When we saw the first time she got the ball and hit that shot, we all knew she was ready to play. I have never seen 'Mo' come into a game and be that active and energetic."

**You've been in four championships and won three straight. What did this one mean?:**

"It means a lot. It brings tears to my eyes. Words really can't describe what it means to me. I couldn't ask for a better group of girls to have won it with. I will carry this with me the rest of my life."

**Guard Monique Martin**

**Talk about your second-half play, coming off the bench and giving this team a boost:**

"At halftime coach Insell was giving us a talk about what we needed to go out and do and he called a coaches meeting. He came back and said Monique we are going back with you. I knew then that I had to go out and do what I had to do to help my team win."

**Head Coach Mary Taylor Cowles**

**Opening Statement:** "Obviously, it didn't end the way we wanted it to. Out of the 40 minute basketball game, I think the Lady Toppers played a 15 minute basketball game. We came out with great enthusiasm and great intensity. We really established ourselves early on. We forced them to get out of their full court defense. We Middle Tennessee went to half court pressure, we went in to a lull offensively, which is just the opposite of what you want to do. We went in to the half time break with a tie score. We knew coming out in the second half that it was going to be a legit 20 minutes of basketball as far as what it was going to take. You have a young lady like Martin who comes in off the bench in the second half and really steps up big for them. We have known all along that Middle Tennessee is a great team. They are extremely talented and play with a lot of experience with players like Horton, Givens and Stovall. They played like a basketball team today. They won a championship because they went out there and worked. They really earned it. Congratulations to Middle [Tennessee]. Hopefully, Western Kentucky still has some basketball left to play this year."

**Guard Tiffany Porter-Talbert**

"It is a disappointing loss. Hats off to Middle [Tennessee], they obviously wanted it more than we did. Defensively, we just weren't there. We weren't in synch. It cost us the whole game. The defensive end is where you are going to win basketball games, especially championships. The offense is going to come, but it has to be sparked by defense. It wasn't there tonight."

**Forward Crystal Kelly**

"We just had some defensive lapses that we usually don't have. That was the only way they got into it even though we did have times where our shots weren't falling. You have to get stops, but we didn't. That is how they got back into the game. As Coach Cowles said, they turned up the pressure, and we didn't respond."