Men claim Sun Belt indoor title

Women place fourth, David selected as Athlete of the Year

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JONESBORO, Ark. - The Middle Tennessee men's track and field team won its 16th indoor conference title on Monday, taking the victory at the 2011 Sun Belt Indoor Championships on Monday in Jonesboro, Ark. The Blue Raider women placed fourth.

- **2011 Sun Belt Indoor Championship Results**

"I was really proud of the teams," head coach Dean Hayes said. "They both competed very hard and the men really deserve this. We added three new athletes in Justus David, Noah Akwu and Ken Gilstrap who were very important in putting us over the top this year."

Monday's championship marks the program's seventh Sun Belt Conference crown since joining the league in 2001. In victory, Middle Tennessee scored 126 points to beat rival and 2011 runner-up Western Kentucky (103) by 23 points. North Texas came in third with 95 points. The Blue Raiders' last SBC indoor title came in 2009.

David was rightfully honored as the 2011 Sun Belt Indoor Track Athlete of the Year for his performance over the last two days. The Kitui, Kenya native scored 34 points for the men in four events. Entering the day as the 2011 Sun Belt 3,000 meter champion, he won his second event of the competition, taking the mile run in a time of 4:13.05. Teammate Festus Chemaoi placed fourth in 4:16.10. The duo also went first and fourth in last night's 3,000 meters, staving off WKU's Shadrack Kipchirchir and David Malone who went second and third in both races.

David later won the men's 5,000 meter in 14:40.80. Chris Mason came in sixth and Justin

Cacaro placed and seventh with respective times of 15:03.51 and 15:06.94 in the 5,000. David added three more points in the 800 meters, placing sixth in 1:57.81.

"There is no question Justus can run. To beat the competition he beat was very impressive to watch," Hayes said.

In the 400 meters, Noah Akwu and Steven Palmer took gold and silver in respective times of 47.53 and 48.29. Akwu became the first Blue Raider since Sean Waller in 2006 to win a Sun Belt open 400 meter crown. Middle Tennessee has six open indoor quarter-mile titles since joining the Sun Belt in 2001.

Akwu followed his performance by taking first in the 200 meters as well. The Egume, Kenya native dominated the competition, winning by almost six 10ths of a second over UALR's Demond Burns. Ken Gilstrap placed fourth in the event in a time of 21.99 and Kendall Bacchus took eighth in 22.16.

Gilstrap took a share of the 55-meter dash title. The freshman's time of 6.36 in the final round, tied that of 2010 NCAA All-American Luther Ambrose of ULM. Bacchus placed seventh in 6.49. The pair totaled 11 points in the event.

The men capped off the victory by winning the 4x400 meter relay in a time of 3:15.92, giving the squad eight first place finishes on the day, nine for the championships. The 4x400 team consisted of Nathaniel Moore, Robert Carter, Palmer and Akwu.

"We really emphasized the sprints this year. Noah and Steven ran very well in the 400 and Gilstrap ran one of the closest races I've ever seen against an All-American from last year. Those two should really be competitive when we host the SBC Outdoor in May."

In the morning session, Josh Butler became the 10th athlete in program history to win the triple jump in an indoor championships competition. He is just the second since the team moved to the Sun Belt Conference. He won with a mark of 50-2.5 (15.30m). Cordairo Golden added two points by placing seventh, giving the men earned 12 important points in the event.

Monday was also the 30th time Hayes was named conference coach of the year. Hayes has been honored 15 times by the OVC and SBC.

The Middle Tennessee women scored 74 points to take fourth behind third-place North Texas (87.5), runner-up Arkansas State (98.5) and six-time reigning champions Western Kentucky (132.5).

Cherice Robertson scored the 3523 points in the Indoor Pentathon to take second.

France Makabu was the only Blue Raider to place in the triple jump. The Paris, France native came in fourth with a jump of 40-9.5 (12.43m) is earn the team five points.

In the sprints, Amber Jackson took third in the 400 meters in a time of 56.02. Kiara Henry placed seventh in the 55-meter dash in 7.12 and eighth in the 200 meters in 25.06.

Hurdlers, Robertson and Rosina Amenbede combined to score nine points in the 55 meter distance. Robertson finished fourth in a time of 7.92, while Amenbede took fifth in 7.98.

Robertson finished second the in the 55 hurdles at last season's championships.

In the 800 meters, Stephanie Smith came in ninth in a time of 2:20.14.

The 4x400 meter relay team of Amber Jackson, Kortney Thurman, Corzaria Harpe and France Makabu placed seventh in 3:55.67.

Selected athletes will travel to Ames, Iowa next weekend to compete in the 2011 NCAA Last Chance Meet. Full results and coverage will be available on GoBlueRaiders.com.

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