# Tale of two halves keeps Blue Raiders unbeaten in Sun Belt play

## Insell moves into second-place tie on school's career wins list

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**MIAMI –** Middle Tennessee turned an eight-point halftime deficit into a 14-point win, rallying for a 74-60 victory at FIU Thursday afternoon to remain the lone team in the Sun Belt women's basketball race with an unblemished record. The Blue Raiders scorched the nets for 60.9 percent from the field, and 70.0 percent from lone range, during the second 20 minutes to sweep the season series against the Panthers. Trailing 35-27 at the intermission, Middle Tennessee got its spark early on a Laken Leonard 3-pointer on its first possession. The Blue Raiders would go on to score 13 of the first 15 points in the period, and used a pair of triples from Kortni Jones to reclaim the lead at 40-37 with 17:07 left. After Tynia McKinzie trimmed the deficit back to one on a layup, Shanice Cason buried the fourth Middle Tennessee trey in four minutes to push the margin to four, 43-39. Twice over the next two-and-a-half minutes FIU would close within one but the Blue Raiders would not surrender their lead. A Jerica Coley jumper made it 46-45 with 13:41 remaining but Ebony Rowe answered at the other end and Cason added another MT field goal to increase the edge to five, 50-45. The Panthers would claw their way back to a two-point difference, 51-49, on a Finda Mansare jumper at 12:05, but again, the Blue Raiders withstood the push by recording a 16-2 run during the next eight minutes to put the game in-hand. Six points apiece from Rowe and Leonard, both on 3-pointers, were a part of the game-changing surge. Coley finally ended the FIU (11-6, 1-3 SBC) drought with a top-of-the-key 3-pointer, opening a 7-0 Panther push as MT hit a lull. Jones hit a 3-pointer of her own at the 2:05 mark to make it a double-digit lead once again, 70-58, before free throws from Icelyn Elie and Cason would close the Blue Raider scoring. Middle Tennessee placed all five of its starters in double-figure scoring, led by 19 from Rowe. She finished a rebound shy of a double-double, grabbing a team-high nine boards, while adding four assists, three steals and the Blue Raiders' lone blocked shot. Elie, Cason and Jones all chipped in 13 points. Elie hauled in eight rebounds, while Cason dished seven assists and Jones finished with three of MT's eight triples. Leonard contributed a career-best tying 12 points, all from behind the arc. FIU was led by Coley's 29 points, which included a 5-of-5 performance at the foul line but 11-of-25 effort from the field. She drained both of the Panthers' 3-pointers. Mansare gave FIU a pair in double-figure scoring with 17 points, while Fanni Hutlassa added eight. Coley collected a team-high seven caroms as part of a slim 35-to-33 battle on the glass in favor of the hosts. The Panthers used balanced scoring to start the game, as

Coley and Mansare each netted four points through the first five minutes helping FIU take a 10-4 lead despite baskets from Jones and KeKe Stewart. Mansare continued to pour in the buckets, scoring six of her team's next eight points as a 5-of-5 start from the field gave her 10 points and matched the Blue Raider team total with 10:47 remaining, as the Panthers led 18-10. Middle Tennessee (13-5, 5-0 SBC) then used a 14-2 run, featuring seven points from Rowe and a 3-pointer from Leonard to take a 24-22 advantage. The surge lasted nearly six minutes, as the Blue Raider defense held FIU to only Hutlassa baskets on both ends of the streak. Hutlassa's run-stopping jumper at 5:55 seemed to re-ignite the Panther offense, as it would get back on track, and after a Stewart field goal with 3:32 to play to provide MT with a 27-24 edge, FIU mounted an 11-0 surge the remainder of the period, including six from Coley, to take a 35-27 lead into the intermission. Hutlassa capped the half's scoring with a put-back underneath the hoop with three seconds remaining, as the Panthers entered the break hitting 61.5 percent of their attempts. The win also was the 161st in the tenure of head coach Rick Insell, tying him with Larry Joe Inman (1979-86) for second place on the school's all-time list. Insell now will set his sights on the career leader, Lewis Bivens (1988-97), who tallied 182 victories. Middle Tennessee will continue its stay in south Florida by traveling just north of Miami to Boca Raton, Fla., for a 2 p.m. Saturday meeting at Florida Atlantic. Dick Palmer will call all the action on the Blue Raider Network of WMOT (89.5 FM) and WGNS (1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM). In addition, 2012 Sun Belt Conference Tournament booklets are now on sale at the Middle Tennessee athletic ticket office. Cost per booklet is $83 and includes a ticket to all eight sessions of the Sun Belt Championships, March 3-6, in Hot Springs, Ark. Fans can purchase booklets by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU or visiting goblueraiders.com.

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