# Lady Raiders Fall 82-72 to Sun Belt East Leader FIU

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**MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -** The Middle Tennessee Lady Raider basketball (8-6, 1-1 Sun Belt) dropped its first Sun Belt Conference game with a 82-72 loss to Florida International (14-4, 3-0 SBC) Saturday in Murphy Center. With 3:38 left in the game, Middle Tennessee was down by two to the Golden Panthers, but a 13-4 run by FIU put the game out of reach for the Lady Raiders. Middle Tennessee's only two buckets in that span came in the final minute of the game, and both were from senior guard Jessica McClure. Senior forward Gergana Slavtcheva who had 24 points and was 10-14 from the free throw line and had one blocked shot led FIU. Of the seven Golden Panthers who saw minutes in the game, five finished the game in double figure scoring. Senior forward Jamie Thomatis led the Lady Raiders with 20 points and five defensive rebounds. It is the 16th time in 25 games she has scored 20 or more points in a game. The only other Lady Raider in double figure scoring was Patrice Holmes who scored 13 points. It is the sixth game in a row that Holmes has finished the game with double figure scoring. Middle Tennessee has its first Sun Belt Conference road swing next week as the Lady Raiders travel to New Mexico State for an 8 p.m. tip-off on Thursday and Louisiana-Lafayette for a 2 p.m. tip-off on Saturday. **HOLMES CONTINUES CONSISTENT PLAY:** After suffering through a mild slump in early December, freshman Patrice Holmes has turned it on over the past six games. During that span she has scored in double figures all six games and averaged 16.7 points and 5.7 rebounds. **PENTTILA BREAKS OUT OF SLUMP:** After going scoreless for three straight games, point guard Paula Penttila found the scoring column once again with five points against FIU. Penttila also registered her first three-pointer since the Houston game on Dec. 20. **THOMATIS TIES FOR SECOND PLACE:** With one made free throw against FIU, senior Jamie Thomatis tied Tawanya Mucker for second place on the all-time list at Middle Tennessee. Thomatis ran her career total to 386 made free throws, but is well behind all-time leader Priscilla Robinson who had 518 from 1991-94. **TEAM BALL:** The Lady Raiders recorded a season-high 20 assists on 29 field goals made today against FIU. That marks the most by a Lady Raider team since they collected 23 at Arkansas-Little Rock on Jan. 8, 2001. Middle Tennessee had 14 assists in the first half alone. **MCCLINIC DISHES OUT A PERSONAL BEST:** Keisha McClinic led the way for Middle Tennessee's 20-assist attack against FIU with a career best eight. McClinic's previous high was four against Cincinnati earlier this season. **NEXT UP:**

The Lady Raiders will begin a two-game conference road swing with games at New Mexico State (6-7) and Louisiana-Lafayette (4-8). MT will face the Lady Aggies on Jan. 10 before heading to Lafayette on Jan. 12. **THIS -N' THAT:** Following a great effort in the win over Memphis, point guard Jessica McClure earned her fourth start of the season today against FIU - With 20 points today against FIU, Jamie Thomatis has now hit for 20 or more points 16 times in her last 25 games - For the first time this year, Middle Tennessee had more assists (20) than turnovers (19) - Freshman Renee Hall came off the bench today to score a career best eight points on 4 of 8 shooting - After shooting a sizzling 54.8 percent from the field in the first half, the Lady Raiders cooled off significantly in the second half by connecting on just 12 of 33 shots (36.4 percent). **FIU Coach Russo** "We played better defense in the second half, allowing them to only shoot 36 percent as opposed to 54 percent in the first half. We were on the boards better in the second half. We did well defensively and we made our free throws. Going into the game, our philosophy was to go inside and we did that. Offensively, we did a real nice job of mixing it up a little bit.

"The first half we didn't play as a team. I told them at halftime that if we wanted to remain the number one team in the conference, we had to change the way we were playing and play together in the second half.

"[Middle Tennessee] is a very good half-court basketball team. They took Georgia to overtime at Georgia. They beat Xavier. They have beaten some really nice teams on the road. This is one of the best teams in the conference."

**Coach Smith** "We played sub-par most of the game, and we were just grotesque from the outside. They got nine offensive rebounds and we did a marginal job at times of boxing out and getting some over the back calls. But when you play 40 minutes against that kind of size, obviously they are going to get some offensive rebounds.

"We had a lot of people play tonight that haven't played very much this season. I thought Renee Hall came in and did a tremendous job, coming in and playing 20 minutes. I thought her size caused some problems for them. She had some easy buckets in the first half."

**Jaime Thomatis** "I don't want to say necessarily they were more aggressive. They just won the game with offensive rebounds and free throws. We had some young people play tonight and that should come into play in March."

**Russo on Thomatis** "Coming into the game we knew she would score some points. She's a great player and she got her points, but then again, we won."

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