

Holmes Nets 25, MT falls to Denver 75-66

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Patrice Holmes scored 25 points and sparked a furious second half comeback against Denver, but the run ended with the Lady Raiders falling to the Pioneers 75-66. Holmes took over the second half for Middle Tennessee, scoring 18 in the second frame, leading the team back from a 17-point deficit at the half. "We had to come out and play hard in the second half and get our transition defense going. We had open shots in the first half, but they just weren't falling. I just did what I had to to get us going," said Holmes. The first half that Holmes alluded to wasn't pretty for the visitors.

The Lady Raiders trailed 29-46 at the break. The team's defense couldn't stop the Pioneers' perimeter attack, which resulted in a 58.1 field goal percentage in the opening stanza. Compounding matters for Middle Tennessee was the fact that Denver canned 8-of-15 treys in the first half. "Not only did they shoot the ball well in the first half, but they scored 16 points in transition in the first 15 minutes of the first half," said head coach Stephany Smith. "We did a poor job coming out of the gate, but I was proud of our effort in the second half." Smith had good reason for her pride in the final frame. Her squad cut the Denver lead to four with 5:47 remaining, but the Pioneers put the icing on the cake with a 10-0 run that gave them a 69-55 lead with 3:06 to play. The Lady Raiders cut the lead back to five with 22 seconds left but could not get closer than that. The loss drops Middle Tennessee to 15-11 on the year and 7-6 in the Sun Belt. Denver goes to 13-12 overall and 9-4 in the league. The game, however, had no real bearing on the Lady Raiders' standing in the East Division. A Western Kentucky loss to North Texas sets up a winner-take-all game against the Hilltoppers on Friday night that will determine second place in the division and give the winner an all-important bye through the first round of the Sun Belt Tournament. "We still have to take care of business on Friday and try to finish second and get that bye. If we can do that, then we won't play [in the tournament] until Sunday, which would be a big lift for our basketball team."

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