Blue Raiders Upset Hilltoppers 69-65

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee celebrated the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Murphy Center in fine style Saturday night, upsetting Western Kentucky 69-65 in front of 3,804.

The Blue Raiders (5-8; 1-0) hung tough in the first half, battling the Hilltoppers (7-6; 0-1) toe to tow through the first 20 minutes of the contest.

After trailing 34-33 at the half, it looked as if the defending conference champions would stamp out any hopes of a Blue Raider victory. WKU opened up the second frame on a 7-0 run that put them up 41-33 with 17:37 left to play.

After a MT timeout, the Blue Raider went on a run of their own to snatch the lead. The Blue Raiders engineered a 14-3 run of their own to take a six point advantage at 50-44 with 12:21 left.

A William Pippen jumper at 9:59 put the Blue Raiders ahead nine, but it would prove to be the largest MT advantage.

From there, the Hilltoppers mounted one final run. Western Kentucky went on a 9-0 run to knot the score at 56. It would be as close as they would come in the remainder of the game.

The Blue Raiders reeled off six straight points to lead 62-56 at the 2:36 mark. Western Kentucky would come within one point at 62-61, but the Blue Raiders used timely free throw shooting from Keith Connor and Pippen, who combined to go 5-6 at the charity stripe in the final 25 seconds to seal the win.

Pippen led both teams in scoring and rebounding with 21 points and 10 rebounds, while Tommy Gunn netted 17 in the Blue Raider effort. Mike Wells and Filip Videnov scored 16 points each for WKU, while Patrick Sparks added 10.

FIRST WIN SINCE '82: Middle Tennessee's upset win over Western Kentucky tonight was its first

over the Hilltoppers since Dec. 8, 1982 at the Murphy Center. Ironically, it was the date when Monte Hale Arena was dedicated.

DOUBLE-DOUBLE: William Pippen came up big for the Blue Raiders against WKU Saturday night. The senior recorded his second career double-double with a game-high 21 points and 10 rebounds. Pippen's 10 boards equaled his personal best set against IUPUI earlier this year.

HOT SHOOTING NIGHT: The Blue Raiders enjoyed their best shooting game of the year tonight against WKU. Middle Tennessee connected on 58.7 percent of its shots from the field on 27 of 46 shooting. It was the best shooting game by the Blue Raiders since hitting on 58.7 percent of their shots in the 2001-02 season opener against Bryan College.

SOLID NIGHT FOR GUNN: Junior Tommy Gunn enjoyed another solid night offensively for the Blue Raiders. Gunn chipped in 17 points on 7-for-12 shooting, including a key three-pointer late in the contest that extended the Blue Raider lead to three points. Gunn, who also added four assists, has scored in double figures 42 times during his career.

THIS 'N' THAT: Middle Tennessee's win over WKU broke an eight-game losing streak against the Hilltoppers ... The game saw 11 different lead changes ... The Blue Raiders won their conference opener for the first time as members of the Sun Belt ... Middle Tennessee has now hit at least one three-pointer in 199 straight games ... Tonight's announced crowd of 3,804 goes down as the largest of the season at the Murphy Center ... The Blue Raiders are now 5-1 when shooting 50 percent or better from the field.

NOTES AND QUOTES

MT Head Coach Kermit Davis: "This is just what we needed. What a way to cap off a great weekend. Sometimes in athletics it just works out the right way. Celebrating the 30th anniversary with all of the former players back from the championship teams, to beat a quality opponent like Western Kentucky is excellent. I am just proud of our effort. We beat a very good team. Finally, down the stretch, we made plays and got the stops we needed to do to finish the game."

"This means a lot. You really respect the job that Dennis [Felton] and his staff do on how they prepare for a game. They have had some tough luck with injuries, but still they have some quality wins against good teams. For our team, it just gives you so much confidence. There is nothing like just winning, and finishing it."

MT Forward William Pippen: "We just wanted to get everybody involved into the game, fans and all. We knew it was the 30th anniversary of the Murphy Center, so we just came out with energy right off the top and ready to play."

"I think the games we lost earlier in the season prepared us for the victory tonight. It is conference time, so we have to step it up. We have to be ready to play every single night."

MT Guard Keith Connor: "I wasn't really nervous or felt any pressure - I just kept thinking only if I hit them, only if I hit them, we win. There really wasn't any pressure and I wasn't nervous."

MT Guard Marcus Robinson: "The only thing I could hope playing defense on a team that shoots threes is just play good defense. If they hit the shot, they hit it. If I come out there and play hard

defense on them and make sure they get bad looks at the goal, hopefully they will miss it. That is the only thing I can hope for."

WKU Head Coach Dennis Felton: "There was a lack of defense by us. Giving up 52 percent in the first half and going out and giving up 67 percent in the second half, 46 percent from three for the game and getting out rebounded, we were lucky to even be in the game."

"In the first half, we didn't front their posts well enough. We allowed their posts far too many good opportunities. They didn't miss a lot of shots, but they got almost half of their misses back. We didn't block out like we need to in order to rebound effectively, which is why we got out rebounded the way we did. Generally, we just lacked the toughness that we needed to get stops."

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