Men Sting Cowboys, 76-63

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee put on a 19-4 run at the beginning of the second half to erase a halftime deficit and went on to defeat Wyoming, 76-63, Thursday night at Murphy Center and remain undefeated at home this season. The Blue Raiders, who ran their mark to 6-0 this season at home and have won 11 of the last 12 at the Glass House dating to last season, trailed 30-28 at halftime and fell behind by five at 34-29 just over a minute into the second half. But Bryan Smithson and Tommy Gunn, who combined for 42 points in the contest, scored the next eight points to start the 19-4 run, as the Blue Raiders opened the lead after the break to as many as 16 points. Middle Tennessee shot 56 percent in the second half while holding the visiting Cowboys to only 30 percent, the lowest for an opponent this season. Smithson, the freshman from Kennesaw, Ga., continues to impress at the point for the Blue Raiders, scoring a season-high 22 points on 6-of-9 shooting to go along with six assists, three rebounds and three steals in a season-high 37 minutes. The youngster was 10-of-15 from the foul line, as well. Gunn rebounded from a poor outing Tuesday night to score 20 points and grab five rebounds, including 16 points in the second half. Senior Steve Jackson again was the spark off the bench, netting a dozen points and six boards in 25 minutes, his second double-figure outing in the last four games. Both squads started fast but cooled in the latter part of the first half. The Blue Raiders did not score a bucket for almost seven minutes, while Wyoming failed to convert for just over five minutes. The Cowboys took the lead at the break, 30-28, thanks to 12 of their 26 offensive rebounds in the contest. But the Cowboys went cold in the second half thanks to suffocating defense from the Blue Raiders, as the visitors were 13-for-44 from the field after the break. Middle Tennessee was 14-of-25 from the field in the second half. Middle Tennessee gets a breather now after playing six games in the last 16 days. The Blue Raiders open Sun Belt Conference action next Thursday, hosting Arkansas State at 7 p.m. **GAME NOTES**

MIDDLE TENNESSEE 76

WYOMING 63

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NON-CONFERENCE SUCCESS: The eight non-conference wins by the Blue Raiders are the most

by a Middle Tennessee team at this juncture of the season since the 1990-91 campaign. That year the Blue Raiders had 10 non-league wins by Jan. 7 before stepping into conference action. PLAYER OF THE GAME: Members of the media voted freshman Bryan Smithson as the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game. Smithson scored a career-high 22 points to pace the Blue Raiders. HE LOVES THE COWBOYS: Senior Steven Jackson likes playing against Wyoming. In the two meetings this year, he averaged 14 points, 5.5 rebounds and hit 12 of 20 shots from the field. On Thursday night, Jackson added 12 points and six boards off the bench. It was Jackson's sixth career double figure scoring game and the fourth this season. FRESHMAN PLAYS BIG: Freshman point guard Bryan Smithson continues to impress with his overall play and Thursday night may have been his best game. The Kennesaw, Ga., native topped the 20-point mark for the first time in his career with a game-high 22 points on 6 of 9 shooting. Smithson also added six assists, three steals and made 10 of 15 free throws. Over the past two games, Smithson is averaging 18.5 points, 4.5 assists, 4.0 rebounds and 2.0 steals. He has also hit 71.4 percent of his shots from the field during that span (10-14) and 76.1 percent of his free throws (16-21). GUNN GETS 20: For the 15th time in his career and the fourth time this year, senior Tommy Gunn topped the 20-point mark with 20 in the win over Wyoming. Gunn, who has now hit in double figures 69 times in 97 career games, went 7-for-14 from the field to go along with five rebounds. SOLID DEFENSE: The Blue Raiders put together their best defensive effort of the year in the win over Wyoming. MT held the Cowboys to a season-low 32.9 percent shooting from the field, including 29.5 percent in the second half, while forcing 19 turnovers. The 32.9 percent is the lowest shooting percentage by an opponent since Denver hit just 32.3 percent against MT a year ago. NICE IMPROVEMENT: The Blue Raiders showed tremendous improvement from the last time they faced Wyoming over a month ago. After losing 84-63 on Nov. 29 in Laramie, the Blue Raiders bounced back to take a 76-63 win at home. That works out to be a 34-point turnaround. TIDBITS: The Blue Raiders remained perfect at home at 6-0 and have now won 11 of their last 12 at the Glass House ... Middle Tennessee has now hit at least one three-pointer in 230 straight games ... The Blue Raiders had just 12 turnovers against Wyoming and only four in the second half. In the past two games, the Blue Raiders have turned it over only 20 times ... Steven Jackson's 12 points was the most by a Blue Raider off the bench since Alex Weekes added 13 against Austin Peay ... Kyle Young equaled his personal-best with two blocks against the Cowboys ... The Blue Raiders won tonight despite being outrebounded on the offensive glass by 15 (26-11) ... Tonight's win was the 95th career coaching victory for Kermit Davis. NEXT UP: The Blue Raiders will have a week off before stepping into Sun Belt Conference play on Jan. 15. Middle Tennessee will open the conference slate at home against Arkansas State. **GAME QUOTES**

MT Head Coach Kermit Davis:

"I am awfully proud of our team. I thought for the second half, for us to shoot 56 percent and limit them to 29 percent was outstanding. We took care of the ball. We played the second half with only three turnovers. I thought we took Wyoming's hard shot in the first half. They competed really well. Their team almost did what we did up there. They ran out of gas and got tired on the road as we did in Laramie. That is a fine basketball team, and they are well coached. It was a very good quality win for us." "Our depth is better because we have added to players. Our team has matured. We are starting a freshman point guard in Smithson and a freshman center in Young. Those guys are growing up and playing better. Like it or not as a coach, but conditioning was a factor up there. It was a two-point game at the half, and they just wore us down in the second half. Here in the second half, we just seemed better conditioned and tougher." **MT Guard Bryan Smithson:**

"In Laramie, their home court advantage was definitely used to their advantage. It was a two-point game at halftime. In the second half, we came out and they just scorched us. We got winded because we just weren't used to the elevation. Our maturity just wasn't there yet. It was just my

second game and my first away game. It was tough. But, I think today we just proved to ourselves that we can play with anybody." "We definitely enjoy playing at home. We love our fans. Hopefully, this game proves to them that we are going to play hard every night. We do feed off of the crowd. When they are ready, we are ready. I just want the crowd to know that we can't go out there and thank them every second, but we really do appreciate their attendance." "My game has definitely improved. In practices most of all, I try to go hard every day. I think playing Cincinnatti was a big turnaround for me. It just proved to me that I could play with anybody in the country. I wasn't my best game. But, I saw sparks of me being a good player every game. I fed off of that, and I just want to continue to play well every game." **MT Guard Tommy Gunn:**
"Our emphasis in practice is defending for long periods of time instead of going through those lapses were we are a little stagnant out on the court. It is an effort issue. We just have to get down and put forth the effort and come out with wins like tonight against quality teams." "We feed off of the crowd a lot. We know the students aren't back yet. It was a nice crowd out there tonight. Hopefully, we can get better attendance in the future games." "What we need to work on is putting together consistent practices and just playing hard every minute of every practice. We have to carry those practices over into the games. This past week we have had some great practices. We were down 17 at VCU and were down at other places. We just have to sustain our effort on defense and stop having those lapses. If we can do that, we will come out with victories."

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