Middle Tennessee Routs Lambuth, 95-54, In Season Opener

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The largest crowd to watch a Middle Tennessee home opener since 1999 filed into Murphy Center Friday night and the Blue Raiders wasted no time giving them plenty to cheer about in a rousing 95-54 win against Lambuth. Middle Tennessee (1-0) jumped all over the visitors from the opening tip and led 26-6 less than eight minutes into the game, much to the delight of an estimated crowd of 3,719 - the largest season-opening attendance since 1999 when 4,873 watched the Blue Raiders beat Tennessee Temple in the opener. "The student-body crowd was great and they were in it from the start and kept up their energy, plus the community was good," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "The 3,700-plus, some people across the country may announce that, but there were that many people here and to have that kind of crowd on a Friday night in November is great. I can understand why people want to see this team because they are a fun team to watch." Six Blue Raiders, led by Mike Dean's 19 points, reached double figures and 11 of the 13 Blue Raiders who played scored in the one-sided victory against the Eagles (5-2). Newcomer Marcus Morrison enjoyed a breakout game with 18 points, five rebounds and three assists in his Blue Raider debut. Michael Cuffee finished with 13 points; Brian Lake added 12, while Bryan Smithson and Kyle Young each finished with 10 points. Smithson had an outstanding night with 10 points, eight assists, no turnovers and three rebounds. In fact, Middle Tennessee's two points guard - Smithson and Fats Cuyler - combined for 12 assists and no turnovers as the Blue Raiders dished out 25 total assists on 35 field goals. They also were guilty of just 12 turnovers. The Blue Raiders shot 52 percent (35-of-67) from the field and a sizzling 41 percent (11-of-27) from 3-point range. They also won the rebounding battle, 42-32. As good as Middle Tennessee was offensively, it was as impressive on the defensive end. The Blue Raiders limited the visitors to just nine field goal attempts in the first seven minutes. Lambuth shot 33 percent from the field and 20 percent from 3-point range. Lambuth actually led 4-3 with 19:14 remaining in the first half but Middle Tennessee went on a 19-0 run during a 3:43 span to put the seize a 22-4 advantage on Dean's

second try. The hot-shooting senior was 4-of-6 from 3-point range, while Morrison was 4-of-5 from beyond the arc. **NOTES:**
A PERFECT START: Sophomore forward Kyle Young was perfect in his 19 minutes of playing time, going 5-of-5 from the field, pulling seven rebounds and dishing out an assist. He also had two blocks. The 6-foot-10 Young had a spectacular run on both ends of the court during one stretch when he blocked a shot on one end and finished with a tip dunk on the offensive end during the first half. **NEWCOMERS SHOW OUT:** All four Middle Tennessee newcomers enjoyed strong debuts against Lambuth. Morrison had 18 points, five rebounds, three assists, a block and a steal. Freshman forward Brian Lake was efficient with 12 points on 5-of-8 shooting. He also pulled three rebounds. Jonathan Loe finished with six points, five rebounds and three assists, while junior guard Fats Cuyler netted one point, but he also had four assists and no turnovers. **SHARING THE BALL:** Middle Tennessee had assists on 25 of its 35 field goals, led by Smithson's eight helpers.
DOMINANT OFF THE BENCH: Quality depth is expected to be strength for the Blue Raiders this season and it showed right away against Lambuth. The Blue Raider bench outscored Lambuth's 25-4 in the season opener. **SWAT SQUAD:** A Middle Tennessee student hung a banner reading "Swat-O-Meter" for the opener and kept up with each of the team's blocked shots. The Blue Raider "Swat Squad" kept him busy with seven total blocks in the game. Alex Weekes led the Blue Raiders with three blocks, while Kyle Young finished with two. Smithson and Morrison also had a block. **MARGIN OF VICTORY:** The 41-point win against Lambuth marked Middle Tennessee's largest margin of victory since a 46-point win against Montreat (98-52) in 1996. **OUTSTANDING TURNOUT:** The announced attendance of 3,719 marked the largest season-opening crowd for Middle Tennessee since 4,873 turned out to watch the Blue Raiders against Tennessee Temple (11/22/99). **PLAYER OF THE GAME:** Junior forward Marcus Morrison was named the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game by the working media. Morrison scored 18 points on 7-of-12 shooting from the field and 4-of-5 from 3-point range in his Blue Raider debut. He also pulled five rebounds and dished out three assists. **QUOTES:**
Head Coach Kermit Davis
"I really liked the energy of our team in the first eight-to-10 minutes. I thought that Bryan Smithson totally took over the game. [Lambuth's] point guard has played pretty well. Just from a defending standpoint, they really couldn't get in to anything because [Smithson] picked him up beyond the half court line. I thought Kyle Young's blocked shot on one end and tip dunk on the other end was just a great hustle play. Mike Dean was just sharp. I was pleased. I wasn't as pleased when you get up 30 or 40 and try to maintain a quality of play at times. When we thought the game was on, our team played with a lot of energy. Probably the most pleasing thing was how we shared the ball. Twenty-five assists were very good." "Bryan Smithson really ran our team and only played 17 minutes. Fats [Cuyler] is going to get better. He can really shoot it. It is almost like he is pressing to make a shot. He just needs to relax and play. Both of those guys did a good job. They were very unselfish, and did a good job of getting our team in to a team defense at the half court line." "I thought Marcus Morrison was very aggressive and played well. Mike Dean and Cuffee were both steady. Smithson and Kyle Young were very physical on the defensive end." "Everybody just let the game come to them. Mike Dean really let the game come to him. He only took ten shots, and was very efficient with 19 points, four assists and one turnover." **Guard Bryan Smithson**
"It was definitely a good game. Lambuth is a good team. Our intensity was up to start the game. This was definitely a great way to start the season." **On creating the early turnovers**
"We just came at them hard. I don't think [Lambuth] is in this kind of atmosphere too often. We give a lot of credit to the fans coming out this early in the season. They were a little timid and we just took advantage." **On the play of MT's post players**

"It was not surprise for us. We practice with them everyday. We know what they can do and what they are capable of." **Forward Marcus Morrison**

"I have just been trying to work on my shot. I shot three for ten in the first game. I was determined to not let that happen again. I felt I had an off night that first game. I have just been in the gym working on getting my shot right." "I just let the game come to me. I fed off of my teammates. They played with a lot of energy. I am not trying to come out and just score. I come out to play defense and rebound. I try to pass the ball as much as I can. There was a lot of energy out there, and we were just excited."

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