

# Four Blue Raiders Reach Double Figures In 81-46 Triumph

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**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** - Stifling defense once again was the headliner as Middle Tennessee improved to 3-0 at home this season with an 81-46 win against Tennessee Wesleyan in front of 2,002 at Murphy Center.

Four Blue Raiders reached double figures, led by Marcus Morrison's 15-point performance, as Middle Tennessee topped the 80-point mark despite the absence of senior guard Mike Dean, the team's leader in scoring and assists, who was sidelined with a knee sprain.

Junior guard Jonathan Loe earned his first career start at Middle Tennessee in place of Dean and was solid with nine points, four rebounds, two assists and two steals in 27 minutes. Michael Cuffee and Morrison each produced double-doubles for the Blue Raiders, becoming the first players to accomplish the feat

since Kyle Young against Tennessee Wesleyan on Dec. 13, 2003. Cuffee not only had the 11 points, but he pulled down a career-high 14 rebounds, while Morrison finished with the 15 points and a career-high 10 caroms. Kyle Young tied a career high with 12 points on 6-of-9 shooting, while Fats Cuyler also had a career high with 10 points.

While the offense racked up 81 points, it was still a smothering Middle Tennessee defense that made the biggest difference. The Blue Raiders (3-2) limited Tennessee Wesleyan (2-7) to 31 percent shooting (19-of-61) and held them to 24 percent (6-of-25) from 3-point range. Middle Tennessee also owned a dominating 54-33 edge on the boards.



Middle Tennessee returns to action when it plays host to Tennessee State Sunday at 4 p.m.

### **Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes**

**DOUBLE TROUBLE:** Marcus Morrison and Michael Cuffee both recorded double-doubles in the win over Tennessee Wesleyan, which went down as the first double-double by a Blue Raider player since Kyle Young accomplished the feat against Tennessee Wesleyan on Dec. 13, 2003. Morrison finished with 15 points and a career-high 10 boards, while Cuffee added 11 points and a personal-best 14 caroms. Cuffee's 14 rebounds went down as the most by a Blue Raider player since Napoleon Rhodes hauled in 20 against UNCG on Nov. 30, 2002 and goes down as the 13th most in a game in school history.

**CLEANING THE GLASS:** Middle Tennessee owned the glass in the win over Tennessee Wesleyan by grabbing 54 boards compared to just 33 by the Bulldogs. The 54 boards are the most ever recorded by a Kermit Davis coached team and is the first time they have topped the 50-rebound mark since pulling down 52 against Tennessee Tech on Feb. 12, 2000. Overall tonight, 11 Blue Raiders recorded rebounds and five set personal-bests in that category.

**YOUNG SOLID:** Sophomore Kyle Young turned in a solid effort in the win over Tennessee Wesleyan on Thursday. Young equaled his personal-high with 12 points on 6-for-9 shooting to go with five boards, three blocks and a steal. Young also equaled his personal-best with six made field goals while establishing a new career mark with nine field goal attempts. The Lewisburg, Tenn., native came into this season with two career double figure scoring games and after five outings in 2004-05 he already has equaled that mark.

**DEFENSE REMAINS STRONG:** Since beginning its current home stand, Middle Tennessee has relied on its defense. Over the past two games, the Blue Raiders have held the opposition to a combined 29.2 percent shooting from the field (33-113) and has out rebounded their opponent by a total of 101 to 60. In Middle Tennessee's three home games, the Blue Raiders have forced the opposition into 30.3 percent shooting (50-165) and has out rebounded them 143 to 92.

**CUFFEE NAMED PLAYER OF GAME:** Following the win over Tennessee Wesleyan, members of the working media named senior Michael Cuffee the Alexander Automotive Family Player of the Game. Cuffee added 11 points on 4-for-13 shooting to go along with a personal-best 14 boards.

**STATE FOES:** With tonight's win over Tennessee Wesleyan, the Blue Raiders improved their record to 7-4 under Kermit Davis against in-state competition and are now 7-1 at home. Middle Tennessee is a perfect 3-0 on the season against state schools in 2004 with victories over Lambuth, Belmont, and Tennessee Wesleyan.

**INSIDE THE PAINT:** True freshman Brian Lake came off the bench to grab a personal-best seven rebounds ... Darrio Scott made his first appearance of the season tonight against Tennessee Wesleyan ... Jonathan Loe made his first collegiate start tonight at guard in place of the injured Mike Dean ... The Blue Raiders are now 31-4 when leading at the half under Davis ... After being shutout in the assist department against Belmont, Bryan Smithson came back to register eight in the win over Tennessee Wesleyan against just one turnover ... Fats Cuyler had a personal-best three steals ... MT moved to 10-0 under Kermit Davis when scoring over 80 points ... Cuffee had scored in double figures in 10 consecutive games dating to last season.

## **MIDDLE TENNESSEE POSTGAME QUOTES HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS**

### **Opening statement:**

"I told our team at halftime that I was glad we only gave up 25 perfect defensively because we are not playing with a lot of confidence offensively right now. I thought we got into a better flow in the second half. Just our inability to score around the goal, no offense to Tennessee Wesleyan because they play hard, but they are blocking our shots. Their post guys are scoring on our guys. In the second half I thought we made a better effort to throw it to Kyle Young and he finally just said, 'I'm the biggest, most athletic guy in the gym, I'm just going to score,' and he did and he was good. Kyle needs to play with that kind of confidence so that was positive. You hold a team to 31 percent, we tried, but we just don't have a great rhythm of offense right now, but then you take 20 points out of the offense with (Mike) Dean unable to play, and he's also our leading assist guy, so you start taking 26, maybe 30 points, and sometimes it takes a bit, no matter who you are playing, to figure out where things are coming."

### **On Tennessee Wesleyan:**

"We prepared for this team just like we did Belmont, Rice or any team. We never take it for granted. I really thought their team played well. I told their coach (Mike Poe) that I thought he did a nice job with their team. They turned it over 20 times but it didn't seem like their turnovers led to easy baskets for us. I thought they were pretty efficient. It was by far, I think, the best they have played, at least the tapes I have watched."

### **Is it a situation where if Dean is in this game he can kind of pull the team out of a drought?**

"He can just separate a game. He can jump up and hit two 3-pointers in a row. What he's been doing is getting in the paint and making other guys better. He's our leading assist guy. You take your leading scorer, who is also your leading assist, and a lot of times he's making the pass that leads to the next pass to score. He can separate a game."

### **Is it in some way a blessing to play a game without Dean?**

"I agree, totally agree, because it was good for Jonathan Loe. I thought Jonathan Loe played well in the first half. He seemed like the perimeter guy who had some confidence, he shot the ball and he ran the floor well. It was good for Marcus Morrison with a double-double tonight. There were positive things. A win is a win. We almost win by 40; you hold to a team to 31 (percent shooting) and out-rebound them by more than 20, so there are positives. What has made us good as a staff is we always know where we are. We are never tricked by different games. We understand what is ahead of us."

### **Do you have to have a better game, at least offensively, against Tennessee State?**

"I think Tennessee State, to date, may be most athletic team we have played, including Rice, as far as just athletic, run, jump, seven, eight or nine guys. We are going to have to be very good against them. We have to be good in the halfcourt and that's where we have to get better."

### **Did you see some better things from (point guard Bryan) Smithson tonight?**

"In the second half. Sometimes Bryan tries to get too deep in the paint. He's so athletic that he can get by the next guy and the next guy. He needs to start understanding more that his pass may lead to the next pass and maybe sometimes get the ball out of his hands. I thought in the second half he was so much better. He was very under control on the break, played off two feet. He had a good line, eight assists, and one turnover. That's a great line."

**SENIOR MICHAEL CUFFEE**

Is this one of those games where you say it wasn't pretty but it was a win? "We don't want our games to look bad but tonight we probably came out a little sluggish and we didn't play with a lot of enthusiasm tonight, but a win is a win."

**Was it difficult to get into an offensive rhythm?**

"We were trying to attack the glass very hard and get a lot of offensive rebounds. Early we missed a lot of easy shots so we have to keep working hard on not doing that in practice."

**Is it going to take a better performance to beat Tennessee State (Sunday)?**

"I believe so. Tennessee State has a very nice team. We have to prepare better. I think we will be ready to come out and play better than we did tonight, and even tougher."

**JUNIOR JONATHAN LOE**

**How did you think you did in your first career start?**

"I guess I did all right. I was trying not to make mistakes and play sound, be consistent. I feel more comfortable in the offense. I kind of understand principles of what we are trying to do much better."

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