Blue Raiders Thump Mississippi Valley; Off To Best Start Since 1997

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee avenged an earlier loss to Mississippi Valley State two weeks ago by completing a four-game homestand with a riveting 75-54 triumph against the Delta Devils in front of 3,011 at Murphy Center Saturday. The Blue Raiders (5-2) completed the homestand with a 4-0 mark and started 5-2 after seven games for the first time since 1997. The four-game non-conference win streak also is the longest for the team since the start of the 1997 season. Middle Tennessee, which suffered a 71-58 setback against Mississippi Valley in Greenville, Miss., exactly two weeks earlier, jumped out to an 11-0 lead six minutes into the game and never trailed as it avenged the earlier setback with a 33-point turnaround. "It was real important to get off to a good start," Blue Raider senior forward Michael Cuffee said. "The last time we saw these guys we played them at their place and lost. Tonight we had to come out with a lot of intensity and get back at them for what they did to us down there." Mike Dean led Middle Tennessee with 13 points, while Cuffee added 12 points and seven rebounds. Alex Weekes finished with a season-high 10 points and led a strong charge by the Blue Raider bench, which produced a season-high 35 points. "I was very proud of our bench play," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "We had 35 points off the bench for our team, which is very good. I thought our team defended well. We were able to shut them out for about seven minutes. There has been a lot of progress made since the last time we played them." Cuffee ignited Middle Tennessee's fast start by scoring the game's first six points and eight of the first 11 as the Blue Raiders seized control early and never let up. Middle Tennessee led 35-25 at the half and quickly increased the lead at the outset of the second half on its way to the big win. Middle Tennessee had one of its better shooting nights, ripping the nets for 52 percent, including 58 percent in the second half when it connected on 25-of-36 shots. Although the Blue Raiders were in rhythm from the field they didn't let up defensively. Mississippi Valley State (2-4) was held to 33 percent shooting, including 5-of-17 from 3-point range. Middle Tennessee will return to action when it faces Toledo in the opening game of the San Juan Shootout, Dec. 20, at 9 a.m. **POSTGAME NOTES**

STRONG START: With the win against Mississippi Valley State, Middle Tennessee improved to 5-2 to start the season. The 5-2 mark is the best start since the 1997 season. **WINNING HOMESTAND:** The Blue Raiders went 4-0 on the current homestand with four straight wins against non-conference foes. The four-game winning streak against non-conference competition is the longest since the start of the 1997 season. **BENCH PLAY:** Middle Tennessee's bench produced almost 50 percent of the team's points against Mississippi Valley State. The Blue Raider reserves provided a season-high 35 points, led by Alex Weekes' 10 points. **DOUBLE-FIGURE NIGHT:** Seniors Mike Dean and Michael Cuffee continued their streaks of being the only Blue Raiders to reach double figures in each game, with 13 and 12, respectively. Cuffee has scored in double figures 12 straight games dating to last season. **DEFENSIVE PROWESS:** Middle Tennessee held Mississippi Valley scoreless for the first 6:26 of the game and limited the visitors to just 32.8 percent (21-of-64) from the field. The Blue Raiders have held four of the first seven opponents to less than 33 percent from the field. They are unbeaten in those games. **POSTGAME QUOTES**

Head Coach Kermit Davis

"I was very proud of our bench play tonight. We had 35 points off the bench for our team, which is very good. I thought our team defended well. We were able to shut them out for about seven minutes. There has been a lot of progress made since the last time we played them." "We really executed and played unselfish. We got out in transition. I thought every shot they took was contested. I thought a big stat early in the game was the job Kyle Young on [Jeffery] Price. I thought Kyle was very physical around the goal. I thought that was a real key to getting us off to a good start." **Forward Michael Cuffee**

"It was real important to get off to a good start. The last time we saw these guys we played them at their place and we lost. Tonight we had to come out with a lot of intensity and get back at them for what they did to us down there. "With the way they were defending us, I was just able to get to open spots and my teammates were able to get me the ball for an easy shot." **Forward Alex Weekes**

"We have been working on hitting the gaps in the zone. Tonight, I was able to put the practice in the game and get a few highlights." "Coach Davis has been on us and pushing us to bounce back. We have a big schedule up ahead, and we are just trying to get our team right. But, we still have some work to do."

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