Middle Tennessee Wins At Austin Peay For First Time In Nine Seasons

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CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee picked a difficult place to notch its first road win of the season by doing what few have done in recent years - beat Austin Peay at home.

In fact, Middle Tennessee had not enjoyed success at the Dunn Center since the 1995-96 season prior to dealing the Governors a 74-70 setback in front of 2,704 to break a five-game road losing streak to Austin Peay Thursday night. Furthermore, Austin Peay had not lost three straight games at the Dunn Center since the 1995-96 season - until losing to the Blue Raiders.

"I think we are a quality team and Austin Peay has three losses to quality teams at home - Wichita State, Western Kentucky and now us, and they could have easily won all three games," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "It's never easy to win on the road and this is always a difficult place to have success so it's a good win for our basketball team."

Middle Tennessee (8-4) received tremendous balance to curtail the Governors, with seven players scoring eight or more points. Blue Raider senior Michael Cuffee continued his solid season with 15 points and seven rebounds, both team highs, while Mike Dean finished with 13 and Fats Cuyler tied his career high with 10. Bryan Smithson added nine points to go along with three steals, while Steve Thomas, Darrio Scott and Marcus Morrison each scored eight.

The Blue Raiders used their trademark defense to stifle the Governors for the most part. Austin Peay shot 43.9 percent (25-of-57) from the floor and managed just 12 field goals in the final 20 minutes. The defense stiffened when the Blue Raiders needed it most. After leading the entire first half, Middle Tennessee saw Austin Peay take a 43-42 lead on Zac Schlader's layup with 16:06 remaining; however, the Blue Raiders held the Governors (2-9) to just two field goals during the next 11:04 to extend the advantage to 62-53.

Middle Tennessee appeared to have the game in hand, leading 71-59 with 1:04 remaining, but the Blue Raiders misfired on back-to-back free-throw attempts and the Governors answered with a pair of 3-pointers to get back into the game, which wasn't sealed until Cuyler nailed the second of two freebies to extend the lead to 74-70 with seven seconds remaining.

The Blue Raiders were efficient from the field, shooting 48 percent for the game, and 50 percent from 3-point-land. They also won the battle of the boards by a narrow 34-33 count, but the biggest difference was bench production as Middle Tennessee's reserves provided 28 points to Austin Peay's 13.

Middle Tennessee will return to action when it plays host to Virginia Commonwealth Sunday at 2 p.m.

NOTES: Middle Tennessee ended a five-game road losing streak to Austin Peay by beating the Governors in Clarksville, Tenn., for the first time since the 1995-96 season ...The eight wins for Middle Tennessee are the most prior to the start of a New Year since 1996 when it also won eight games prior to the start of a new calendar year ... Mike Dean moved into ninth-place on the career 3-pointer goals made list at Middle Tennessee with one trey against Austin Peay. He has 85 career 3-pointers and has hit at least one long-range shot in each of his 34 career games at Middle Tennessee ... Senior guard/forward Michael Cuffee has scored in double figures 17 straight games dating to last season ...Middle Tennessee improved to 5-0 against Tennessee opponents this season and is 10-4 all-time against in-state competition under Head Coach Kermit Davis, including a 8-2 mark the past two seasons ... Middle Tennessee earned its 72nd career win against Austin Peay - the most victories the program has against any single opponent ... Middle Tennessee improved to 6-0 on the season when its bench scores at least 20 points. The Blue Raider reserves outscored Austin Peay, 28-13, led by Bryan Smithson's nine points.

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