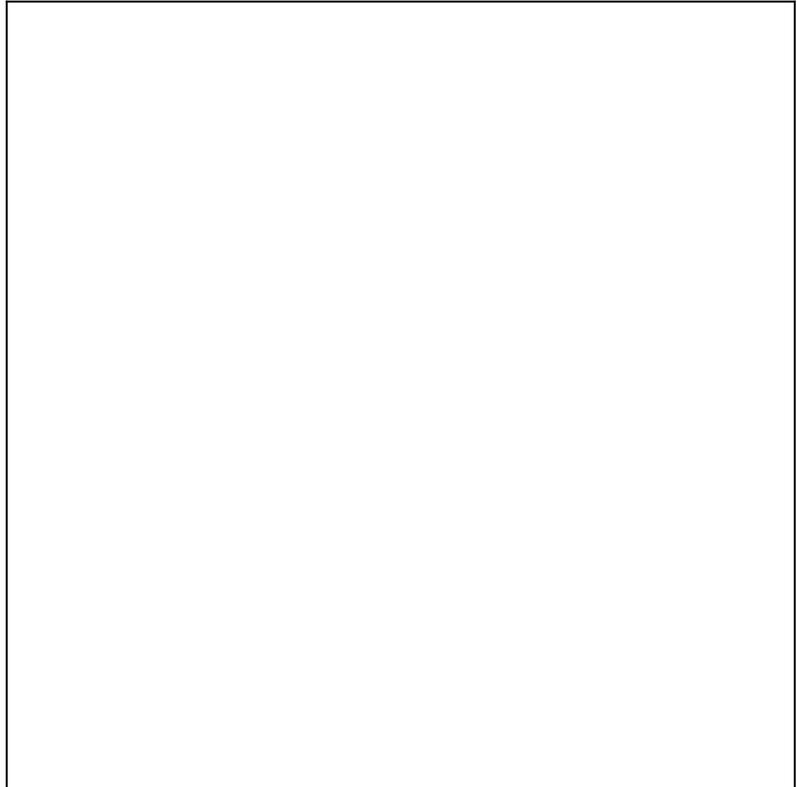


# Streaking Blue Raiders Make History With 66-61 Win At IPFW

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**FORT WAYNE, Ind.** - Middle Tennessee's streaking basketball team is winning games at a historical pace and its latest triumph - a 66-61 win at IP-Ft. Wayne Wednesday night - enabled the Blue Raiders to accomplish something never before done in the program's history.

With the road win, Middle Tennessee improved to 10-4 overall entering next Monday night's Sun Belt Conference opener against Arkansas-Little Rock. The 10 non-conference wins are the most pre-conference wins in the school's 91-year basketball history and it also marks the earliest date (Jan. 5) the program has reached 10 wins in its history.



"I'm pleased with where we are but we all know there is room for improvement," said Middle Tennessee senior guard Mike Dean, whose four clutch free throws in the waning seconds sealed the win. "We have had a nice pre-conference run and now it's time to start working on conference and come out strong against Arkansas-Little Rock Monday."

The Blue Raiders have won three straight and nine-of-11 with the only setbacks during the stretch being a five-point loss to Auburn on a neutral court, and a road loss at once-beaten Villanova.

"We have to be better than we were tonight against a very good Little Rock team Monday night but it is nice momentum heading into conference play," Middle Tennessee third-year coach Kermit Davis said. "We were not close to our best (Wednesday) but we found something in us the last 15 minutes when we were down six and nothing was going right to come back and find a way to win. We will take the win, get on the bus and go home."

Michael Cuffee continued his outstanding senior campaign by leading Middle Tennessee with 17 points on 7-of-11 shooting, while Dean added 16 points. Marcus Morrison continued to provide a spark off the bench and narrowly missed his third double double of the season with 11 points and

nine rebounds. Middle Tennessee's bench was the difference in the game with Morrison, Bryan Smithson and Alex Weekes all being major contributors as the Blue Raider reserves outscored IP-Ft. Wayne (3-12) by a 21-5 margin.

The pesky Mastadons led by as many as eight with 4:20 remaining in the first half before Cuffee scored seven points in a three-minute span to get the Blue Raiders to within 30-29 at the intermission. IP-Ft. Wayne, behind the hot shooting of guard Beau Bauer, wouldn't go away in the second half and led 42-36 with 12:41 remaining. Bauer led the Mastadons with 22 points on the strength of seven 3-pointers.

Middle Tennessee used its strong defense to mount a comeback, collecting 10 total steals, and scoring in transition. Dean's long 3-pointer following a forced turnover gave the Blue Raiders a 47-45 lead with 9:46 remaining and they would never trail from that point, although the game was in doubt until the final minute.

Dean made four consecutive free throws after IP-Fort Wayne had trimmed an eight-point deficit to two, 62-60, with 17 seconds remaining. Dean was 6-of-6 from the charity stripe in the win.

Middle Tennessee will return to action Monday when it plays host to defending SBC East champion Arkansas-Little Rock.

**NOTES:** Middle Tennessee's 10 non-conference wins are the most prior to entering league play in the program's 91-year history ... The 10 wins by Jan. 5, represent the fast the team has reached as many victories in its history ... Mike Dean moved into sole possession of eighth-place on the all-time 3-point goals made list at Middle Tennessee with two against IP-Fort Wayne. He has 89 career treys ... Middle Tennessee is now 7-0 when its reserves score 20 or more points. The Blue Raider bench outscored IPFW 21-5 Wednesday ... Middle Tennessee improved to 4-0 all-time against IPFW.

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