Blue Raiders cap road trip with 87-75 win at Belmont

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NASHVILLE - Middle Tennessee made itself at home in its first visit to Belmont's plush Curb Event Center, putting on an offensive clinic and displaying its most dynamic defensive demonstration of the season in an 87-75 triumph here Saturday night. The Blue Raiders (4-2) erupted for their season high in points and tied their season high for shooting percentage (52.5) much to the delight of hundreds of Middle Tennessee fans who made the short trek to Nashville and were among the 2,545 in attendance. "I really appreciate all the Middle Tennessee people being at the game," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "I thought it was an excellent turnout and sitting there right behind our bench gave our players big lifts throughout the game. It was just nice to see that following. That's why I think this series is big because our fans can enjoy it, come over here and watch the game, and vice versa. I'll tell you what, it was a nice road win for our club." The trip was worth it as Blue Raider fans, which were saluted by team members following the game, watched Middle Tennessee win on Belmont's home court for the first time since Dec. 8, 1967. They also witnessed the Blue Raiders' seventh consecutive win against in-state opponents under Davis, who tied Ed Diddle, Jr., for seventh on the all-time Middle Tennessee wins list with 56 victories. Five players tallied double figures in scoring for the Blue Raiders, led by junior

post Kyle Young's career high 19-point performance. Young also ripped a team-best eight rebounds to continue a breakout campaign. While Young was enjoying a career night, senior Marcus Morrison produced his best performance of the season with 18 points and seven rebounds, both season highs. "It was great to come out and get a big road win like this and play well in the process," said Morrison, who helped the Blue Raiders conclude the tough road trip with a 2-1 record. "I was able to get a couple high energy plays early in the game and that got me going. It was a lot of fun." Joining in the fun were Adam Vogelsberg, who had his best all-around game as a Blue Raider with 13 points to go with career highs in rebounds (5) and assists (4). Bud Howard was solid with 12 points, three rebounds, two assists and two steals, while Brian Lake had his best game of the season with 10 points and five rebounds, four of which were offensive caroms. While the offense was clicking, the defense was sound against a dangerous Belmont squad that came into the game shooting 42 percent from 3-point range. The Blue Raiders put a stranglehold on the perimeter shooters and held the Bruins (3-3) to 5-of-23 shooting from beyond the arc. Another factor in the game's outcome was Young's defense on Belmont's Boomer Herndon. The 7-foot center had 10 points and nine rebounds at the half, but was held to two points - both on free throws - and two rebounds by Young in the second half. "I was challenged at halftime to do better and if we wanted to win the game then I felt like I had to come out and do better," said Young, who was asked who challenged him and what was said in a follow-up question, to which he continued, "it wasn't just coach (Davis) who challenged me. He did say I needed to play better defense and be more aggressive on offense. At the same time, (Herndon) was having a great first half with the 10 points and nine rebounds. I kind of took that personal. I felt I had to figure out a way to do something." Whatever he figured out worked because Young held Herndon to 0-of-5 from the field in the second half, while becoming an offensive juggernaut on the other end of the floor. Young scored 15 of his career-high 19 points in the second half on seven-of-eight shooting from the field. Morrison also did the brunt of his damage after the intermission, when the Blue Raiders turned a slim 33-31 advantage into a double-figure road win against a quality team. Morrison scored 14 of his season-high 18 points on five-of-six shooting in the second half. He also collected five of his seven rebounds in the decisive final 20 minutes. After coming from behind to secure a 33-31 halftime advantage, Middle Tennessee opened the second half with a 16-7 run to build a 49-38 lead with 14:10 remaining. The Blue Raiders stretched the lead to as many as 20 points midway through the second half and secured the double-figure victory. Hustle plays were once again a key for Middle Tennessee, which scored 18 second-chance points and 14 more off Bruins turnovers. The Blue Raiders also dominated the game in the paint, where they outscored Belmont, 52-32, including a whopping 32-14 in the final 20 minutes. The Blue Raiders will not have games during the upcoming week due to final exams. They will return to action against Freed-Hardeman, Sunday, Dec. 18, at the Murphy Center at 2 p.m.

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