Blue Raiders celebrate return home with 77-68 win against Indians

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - A return to the friendly confines of Murphy Center for the first time in more than two weeks and only the fifth time all season proved to be a winning recipe for Middle Tennessee, which ended a two-game losing skid with a 77-68 win in front of 3,897 at the "Glass House" Thursday.

Adam Vogelsberg led three Middle Tennessee players in double figures with 19, while Marcus Morrison tallied his third double double of the season with 14 points and a career-high 13 rebounds. Fats Cuyler finished with 16 points, followed by nine points and eight rebounds from Tim Blue and eight points and seven boards for Kyle Young.

Vogelsberg, who shared co-Player of the Game honors with Morrison, tied his career highs for points (19), assists (4) and steals (2) to help Middle Tennessee (8-6, 1-1) end a two-game losing skid and win its Sun Belt home opener for the fourth consecutive year under coach Kermit Davis.

Junior guard Bud Howard also demonstrated the impact he has on a game with a fine all-around performance. Howard dished out three assists and tied his career high with three steals. His energy and all-around play helped to ignite Middle Tennessee's first-half run.

"It sure was nice to be home in familiar surroundings," Vogelsberg said. "I think we hit some shots early and got some confidence going and then the crowd got behind us. It was a good win and it was one we certainly needed against a good conference team."

Middle Tennessee won the rebounding battle, 41-31, including pulling a season-high 17 offensive rebounds. Morrison's dominance on the boards with 13 not only was his career high, but also the most in a game since Lee Nosse pulled 13 at Western Kentucky, Feb. 23, 2002. The Blue Raiders also had a season-low 10 turnovers, while forcing 20 Arkansas State (7-11, 2-2) miscues.

"This was a win we desperately needed," Davis said. "It was probably the best our team felt after a win. Was it our best game? No. It was a win we needed and it gave our team a lot of energy going into Saturday's game (against Arkansas-Little Rock)."

The first half was a back-and-forth battle before Middle Tennessee used an 11-2 run to close the half and turn a 25-24 deficit into a 35-27 halftime edge. Arkansas State never led in the second half but it did tie the game once and was within one on eight different occasions. The Indians trailed 68-62 when Vogelsberg stuck the final dagger, a long 3-pointer from the right win to stake the Blue Raiders to a 71-62 lead with 1:57 remaining. From there, Arkansas State would never get closer than seven.

The Blue Raiders return to action when they play host to two-time defending Sun Belt East Champion Arkansas-Little Rock Saturday at 7 p.m.

POSTGAME NOTES:

STILL PERFECT: Middle Tennessee ran its all-time record against Arkansas State to 10-8 but more impressively are now a perfect 7-0 against the Indians under Kermit Davis. The Blue Raiders are 4-0 under Davis against ASU at home and 3-0 on the road. Middle Tennessee will have a chance to make it 8-0 when the two teams meet in Jonesboro on Feb. 16.

CUYLER IN 9TH: With four three-pointers in the win over Arkansas State, senior Fats Cuyler moved into ninth place on the career three-pointers made list. Cuyler, who surpassed Torrey Moore, now has 88 career treys and needs 14 more to take over eighth place from Tim Gaither (101). Head Coach Kermit Davis has now coached four of the top ten three-pointers in school history (Tommy Gunn (2), Mike Dean (5), Fats Cuyler (9), John Humphrey (10)).

DOUBLE-DOUBLE: Senior Marcus Morrison recorded his team-leading third double-double of the season with 14 points and a career-high 13 rebounds in the win over Arkansas State. The St. Petersburg, Fla., native now has six double-doubles for his career.

ON THE GLASS: Over the past four games, senior Marcus Morrison has done a great job of hitting the glass and pulling down rebounds. During that span, Morrison is averaging 9.3 caroms a game after ripping down a career-best 13 in the win over ASU. For the year, Morrison is second on the team at 5.8 boards a game.

PROTECTING THE ROCK: A key to Middle Tennessee's win over Arkansas State on Thursday night came in the turnover department. The Blue Raiders had a season-low 10 turnovers while forcing 20. The 10 turnovers went down as the fewest by the Blue Raiders since turning it over only nine times against Portland State on Feb. 19, 2005.

CHAIRMEN OF THE BOARDS: After being outrebounded the previous four games, Middle Tennessee took out its frustrations on Arkansas State. The Blue Raiders ripped down 41 rebounds compared to just 31 by ASU, including an incredible 17-5 advantage on the offensive end. The 41 rebounds against ASU went down as the most by the Blue Raiders since pulling down 44 against Freed Hardeman on Dec. 18.

CO-PLAYERS OF THE GAME: Marcus Morrison and Adam Vogelsberg were voted the Alexander Automotive Family Co-Players of the Game against Arkansas State by members of the working media. Morrison and Vogelsberg combined for 33 points and 14 rebounds to pace the Blue Raiders.

TIDBITS: Under Kermit Davis the Blue Raiders have won the 14th game of the season four straight years and the 14th game has been against Arkansas State three times ... Freshman Theryn Hudson missed the first game of his career tonight when he was sidelined with a knee injury ... Under Kermit Davis the Blue Raiders are now 49-6 when leading at the half ... The 17 offensive rebounds by the Blue Raiders went down as the most in a game since Feb. 19, 2005 when they also had 17 against Portland State ... Adam Vogelsberg has now hit three or more three-pointers in a game seven times this season ... For the sixth time this season, Vogelsberg was perfect at the free throw line as he hit all six attempts against ASU ... Calvin O'Neil scored his first collegiate points when he nailed a three-pointer in the first half against ASU. O'Neil finished the game with four points ... Kermit Davis is now a perfect 4-0 in conference home openers ... Adam Vogelsberg tied his career-high in assists (4) and steals (2).

POSTGAME QUOTES

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

Opening Statement:

"I thought tonight was a win we desperately needed. It was probably the best our team felt after a win. Was it our best game? No. It was a win we needed and it gave our team a lot of energy going into Saturday's game."

Thoughts on Issac Wells' making key 3-pointers for Arkansas State:

"He made the difference in their team. He brought them back in the game against Florida International. He can make big threes that can bring his team back into the game."

About outrebounding Arkansas State:

"The percentage for them offensively is too high. We didn't shoot the ball well, but we went and got it. The biggest stat in the game was getting rebounds, which allowed us to get some second opportunities that helped us win this game."

On how Thursday's win will boost confidence:

"This is definitely a step in the right direction to get us back into our winning ways. We needed this win to get a big boost of confidence before we have our next game against Arkansas-Little Rock."

Forward Marcus Morrison

Thoughts on expecting a close and physical game:

"I expected an all-around physical game. It always seems to be one or two at the end, even though we had a good lead."

On concentrating on tonight's game after two difficult losses:

"It's hard to forget those; we try to look at those losses and use energy for our next game to show people in the Sun Belt Conference that we are for real."

Thoughts on playing the 4 position:

"I am still the same player, but at a different position. I think it's easier playing the 4 position because I am closer to the basket. The only challenge is keeping the big guys from scoring."

Guard Adam Vogelsberg

About making some big shots early in the game against Arkansas State:

"It felt good to get back in a rhythm. I've been missing a lot of shots early. It helps you gain some confidence when you can make some shots early. When you start to play well, others around you

start to feed off your energy and others begin to play well."

Thoughts on the two previous losses, before Thursday's game:
"We were kind of down. We needed this win to get our confidence back and help us get back where we were earlier in the season."

About Saturday's game at home versus Arkansas-Little Rock
"We can't lose at home and then expect to get a big road win at a conference opponent's home court. We need to come out and play with intensity for Saturday's game."

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