

Blue Raiders begin exhibition season with win over Lady Railsplitters

All five starters net double-figure points

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team opened up a close game in the first half with a 14-4 run to lead by double digits and never look back in defeating Lincoln Memorial 94-59 Thursday night inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

The Blue Raiders built an early 10-0 lead, including the first points of the season on an Anne Marie Lanning 3-pointer, before the Lady Railsplitters closed the gap to 16-12 with just under nine minutes passed in the first half. Freshman Ebony Rowe then grabbed an offensive rebound off a missed trey attempt by Lanning and recorded the put-back to begin an 8-0 spurt over the next four minutes.

Lincoln Memorial trimmed the deficit down to as low as eight, 26-18, following a pair of Dayshalee Salaman free

throws with 6:20 left. Middle Tennessee then countered with a 14-4 run, which included an old-fashioned three-point play by sophomore Icelyn Elie and a triple by classmate Kortni Jones, to build a 40-22 edge with 2:59 left. Lanning capped the spurt by stealing a Melanie Todd pass in the backcourt and converting a layup at the other end.

Patrice Talley and Chelsea Craig each hit the front-end of free throws, keeping the Lady Railsplitters within 18 at the 1:44 mark. However, the Blue Raiders entered the halftime break with a 7-0 run, as sophomore Dymon Raynor knocked down a layup with eight seconds remaining to make the halftime



score, 49-24.

Lanning then began the second half the same way she started the first, with a 3-pointer, to help Middle Tennessee build a 28-point, 52-24, lead with 19:35 to go. The advantage swelled to as high as 30 early in the frame, 63-33, as junior Tina Stewart rebounded her own missed trey and put in the short-range jumper at the 15:43 mark.

Kendra Holmes then added a pair of field goals for Lincoln Memorial and Melanie Hemphill added another, cutting the gap to 24, 65-41, seven minutes into the stanza. Jones tallied another triple and Lanning and Rowe chipped in buckets to push the margin to 31, 72-41, as the halfway mark of the period elapsed.

Stewart hit another 3-pointer at the 4:24 mark on an assist from sophomore Jamila Ajanaku make it a 34-point difference, 82-48. Down the stretch, the lead would increase to a game-high 37 on a pair of occasions, the last coming on an Ajanaku jumper with 29 seconds to go. Amberly O'Dell connected on the final basket of the game with five seconds to play, deciding the final outcome.

All five Blue Raider starters reached double figures, led by 19 from Stewart. Lanning contributed 16, while Jones and Elie each tallied 14. Rowe rounded out the group with 10 points.

Elie led all MT players with eight rebounds, one more than Rowe in her collegiate debut, as the Blue Raiders held a 42-31 lead on the glass. Jones had six assists, tying the Lady Railsplitters' team total, while Rowe swiped a team-high four steals.

Salaman paced Lincoln Memorial with 18 points, followed by 15 and a team-best seven boards from Talley.

Middle Tennessee will return to action with the second exhibition contest at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday against Alabama-Huntsville, also inside the Murphy Center.

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