

# Blue Raiders take early lead in road win

## MT uses 21-0 first half run to break open close game

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### CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee withstood a strong second half push by Austin Peay after building a large lead in the opening period to pull out a 74-60 road victory in non-conference women's basketball action Tuesday night inside the Dunn Center. The win gives the Blue Raiders their first 2-0 start to a season under head coach Rick Insell and for the first time since 2003-04.

Freshman Ebony Rowe, the reigning Sun Belt Player of the Week, led the charge once again with her second double-double in as many games. She shared game-high honors with 18 points and hauled in a game-best 12 rebounds, eight on the offensive glass, while setting a career high with three steals in 33 minutes.

Sophomore Kortni Jones was the only other MT player to reach double-figure scoring, tallying 14 points, including two of the team's five 3-pointers. Senior Anne Marie Lanning handed out a season-best tying six assists.

Three Lady Gavs finished with double-digit points, led by 18 from Whitney Hanley. She converted one-half of the team's 14 free throws. Others joining her were Brooke Faulkner with 14 and Jasmine Rayner with a dozen.

In a first half, which saw teams trade runs, it was Middle Tennessee's 21-0 spurt covering over eight minutes halfway through the period that put the game out of reach. The two squads were nip-and-tuck through the first three minutes even though junior Tina Stewart and Jones hit back-to-back triples to help the Blue Raiders build an 11-7 lead following Jasmine Rayner's bucket at 16:48.



The next time down the floor, Middle Tennessee (2-0) fed the ball inside to Rowe, and she hit the first of two consecutive field goals and ignited the long Blue Raider run. Five different players netted points, which included nine two-pointers, before Jones ended the long streak with her second trey of the stanza at 9:24 for a 32-7 advantage, forcing the second Lady Gov timeout to be called.

Austin Peay then picked up its intensity over the next five minutes, outscoring MT 10-0, as Brooke Faulkner and Whitney Hanley each tallied four points, before Jones snapped the drought with a jumper at 4:24. Again, the Blue Raiders took control, outscoring the hosts 7-2 the remainder of the period and limiting the Lady Goves to a pair of free throws on separate trips for their only points to enter halftime ahead, 41-19.

The second half featured Austin Peay (0-2) making an early run in an attempt at putting a dent into Middle Tennessee's 22-point halftime lead. Before seven minutes had elapsed, the Lady Goves outscored the Blue Raiders 18-5 to trim the margin to single digits at nine, 46-37, with 13:14 left on a Faulkner 3-pointer. It was her second triple of the period and complimented Rayner's eight points during the spurt.

Lanning buried a corner trey at 10:52 to start a 6-0 MT run, extending the lead back to 16, 56-40, on a pair of Jones charity tosses with 9:50 to play. Austin Peay, however, did not quit and closed within 11, under a minute later on a Hanley layup.

The next nine points fell into Middle Tennessee's favor with sophomore Icelyn Elie, Rowe and freshman Jordyn Luffman each contributing points to push the advantage back to 20, 65-45, at the 6:06 mark. The lead never dipped below 16 through the next four minutes, but two sets of Hanley free throws decided the final margin.

The Blue Raiders were the hot shooting team in the first 20 minutes, connecting on 18-of-36 (50.0 percent) from the field and finished at 46.7 percent. The Lady Goves torched the nets in the second half, draining 13-of-21 field goals for 61.9 percent to finish above 50 percent for the game at 51.2 percent.

Middle Tennessee will return to action with its second-straight road game, traveling to Fayetteville, Ark., to face the SEC's Arkansas at 2 p.m. Sunday. It will be just the second meeting between the two schools and the first since February 1983.

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