

# Four starters in double figures spark Blue Raider home win

## Kortni Jones tallies career-high 19 points to lead MT

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**MURFREESBORO, Tenn. –** Middle Tennessee returned home Friday night and placed four starters in double figures to earn an 87-71 non-conference women's basketball victory over in-state foe ETSU inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The Blue Raiders rebounded from their first loss of the season with the win, while handing the Lady Bucs their third-straight defeat.

Sophomore point guard Kortni Jones, playing with a face mask after injuring her nose in practice earlier in the week, led the way offensively with a career-high 19 points, including 5-of-7 from behind the 3-point arc. She added game-best tying seven assists and four steals, while grabbing three rebounds on the defensive glass in 33 minutes.

Freshman Ebony Rowe continued to dominate the interior, posting her third double-double in the season's first four games with 18 points and 13 rebounds, including eight offensively. She connected on one-half of her 14 field goal attempts and drained 4-of-6 from the charity stripe.

Senior Anne Marie Lanning added 14 points, including 4-of-7 from 3-point territory, while sharing game-high honors with Jones with seven assists and four steals. Junior Tina Stewart was the other Middle Tennessee (3-1) starter to reach double figures, netting a career-best tying 12 points and dishing five assists with three steals.



Redshirt freshman Lauren March tallied the first points of her collegiate career with eight off the bench and sophomore Dymon Raynor equaled her career high with eight points in just 10 minutes. Junior Molly McFadden saw her first action of the season and true freshmen Janay Brinkley and Laken Leonard stepped onto the collegiate hardwood for the first time.

Latisha Belcher set the pace for ETSU (2-3) with 17 points, including 9-of-11 from the foul line. Destiny Mitchell and Shawn Randall, who each registered a dozen, joined her in double figures. Mitchell hauled in a team-high seven boards. The Lady Bucs' leading scorer coming in, Tara Davis, was held to less than half her average, finishing with eight points in 26 minutes before fouling out with 2:43 remaining.

Davis opened the game with a corner 3-pointer and Gwen Washington added a layup two minutes later to ignite an early 5-0 ETSU lead. The margin grew to a game-high six, 10-4, on an old-fashioned three-point play by Washington at 14:59.

Jones then began the Blue Raider process of chipping away at the deficit with her first trey a minute later before Lanning buried her first to cut the margin to two, 12-10, with 13:28 left in the opening period. Jones drained another long-range bomb at 12:16 to give Middle Tennessee its first lead, 15-12, before Rowe poured in the next four points as part of a 12-0 spurt over a three-minute stretch.

The Lady Bucs, however, clawed back on the strength of a Belcher jumper and another three-point play from Mitchell to trim the score to two, 19-17, with 9:35 remaining. Again, the Blue Raiders would widen the gap, tallying the next 15 points, featuring 3-pointers from Lanning, Jones and Stewart, to pull ahead 34-17 with just under seven minutes to go.

Randall recorded eight of ETSU's next 10 points, slicing the lead back to single digits, 36-27, at the 4:29 mark. KeKe Stewart then pitched in four free throws down the stretch and Jones stole the ball and added a layup with 10 seconds remaining to send MT into the locker room ahead, 47-33.

The early second half lead quickly became 24, 61-37, at 15:14 when a Jones 3-pointer capped a 14-4 spurt to begin the period. Natalie Pickwell was fouled attempting a triple on the Lady Bucs' next trip down the floor and sank all three charity tosses to make it a 21-point difference, 61-40, with 14:55 left.

The Blue Raiders pushed their edge back to 24 two more times, the last coming on a turnaround jumper in the lane by March for her first collegiate points at 10:20 for a 68-44 advantage. Free throws kept the Lady Bucs within striking distance, as they made 17-of-19 during the second 20 minutes; however, Middle Tennessee off-set the points by making timely shots and not allowing ETSU within 15 the remainder of the game.

A 2 p.m. Sunday contest with South Dakota State will close the two-game homestand for the Blue Raiders before they embark on a three-game road swing in early December. Tune into the Blue Raider Network for all of Sunday's action live with Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey on the call on WGNS (100.5 FM, 101.9 FM, 1450 AM), WMOT (89.5 FM) and WBRY (96.7 FM, 1540 AM).

### **Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes**

#### **Head Coach Rick Insell:**

We scored enough points that we were able to win the ball game. Ebony Rowe had another yeoman's effort. She has played four games and has had three double-doubles.

We had 19 turnovers, and at least six or seven of them were unforced turnovers where we overthrew a cutter, or went inside and tried to do things we could not do. When we do things that we are capable of doing, we are a pretty good basketball team. We are not juniors and seniors yet, we are sophomores and freshmen, and the ones that are making those mistakes are the sophomores and freshmen. We have to live with it, but it is trying our patience sometimes. We get to doing something well and it is working, then we want to try something else, and we do not need to do that. But we are learning. We did better tonight than we had done in our other three games over those small details.

**Kortni Jones:**

I did not really want to wear the mask, but I reconsidered it quick after I hit those first two threes. I thought that maybe this is not so bad. I am definitely going to wear it until I have a bad game, which I hope does not happen, but I will not put up any more arguments about it.

Coach has been harping a lot the last week, since we lost to Arkansas, about me, as the point guard, becoming more vocal. I have to be able to take it to another level, and lead my team, because that is my position. After I saw we were not really getting after it, then I took a couple of shots, which is my role, to shoot the ball and hope it goes in, and it went in tonight. We turned it up a little.

The key to the game was our defense. We wanted to slow them down. In their previous game, they got a lot of transition points, and we tried to take their point guard play away, and she ended up fouling out. She is definitely the engine to their team, and to get her out of her game was key to getting a big win.

**Anne Marie Lanning:**

We need to come out and not take so long to get the lead. Our aggression needs to get better, and keep continuing the way it has been.

We are getting better, but we still have a lot to work on. Our team chemistry is, on a scale of 1-10, a four or five, and we need to get it on up there to an eight or better. We are still growing as a team and our chemistry is going to get better.

We are going to continue to get better every day, as long as we keep working hard.

**ETSU Postgame Quotes**

**Head Coach Karen Kemp:**

We knew we were going to be in for a really tough battle tonight. Middle is a really good basketball team. They are a little bit young, but Ebony Rowe has come in and done really great things. It was good for us, and it is going to help make us a better basketball team. We are just looking forward to getting back on the court for practice and get ready for our next game.

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