

# Hot start keys Middle Tennessee win over South Dakota State

## Blue Raiders take 19-0 lead, force 38 total turnovers

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### MURFREESBORO, Tenn. –

Middle Tennessee scored the game's first 19 points, which ended up being the final margin, to never look back and run away with a 70-51 home win over South Dakota State in non-conference women's basketball action Sunday afternoon inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

The Blue Raiders forced 14 Jackrabbit turnovers in the opening eight minutes, while holding their opponents scoreless before Kristin Rotert ended the drought with a 3-pointer at 11:32. Middle Tennessee's offense, meanwhile, placed just three players in the scoring column during the stretch on its way to a second-straight win on the season.

South Dakota State (3-2) finished with 38 turnovers in the game, including a pair of backcourt violations, a three-second call, an expiration of the shot clock and a lane violation. The Blue Raiders capitalized on the miscues, turning them into 28 points.

Junior Tina Stewart's career-high 15 points led Middle Tennessee (4-1), as four players reached double figures. Stewart topped her previous career best of a dozen, which she tied in Friday's victory over ETSU, with a corner 3-pointer with 10:32 remaining. She added five steals, three assists and 7-of-8 free throws in 31 minutes.



Freshman Ebony Rowe poured in 14 points and hauled in a team-best five rebounds. Senior Anne Marie Lanning and sophomore Icelyn Elie each contributed 12 points in the balanced attack.

Sophomore Kortni Jones handed out a career-high 10 assists, one shy of joining the school's all-time Top 10 list. She swiped a career-best seven steals, as part of 20 overall by the Blue Raiders.

Rotert paced the Jackrabbits with 18 points, draining one-half of her 10 field goals and 6-of-7 free throws. Megan Waytashek was next with nine points and Jill Young posted eight, equaling Rotert with a team-high two 3-pointers. Young had 10 of the team's miscues on the afternoon, while she tied Waytashek and Katie Lingle for game-high honors with six rebounds apiece.

Middle Tennessee used the 19-0 start to build a cushion that would not reach single digits throughout the rest of the 40 minutes. Rotert netted nine of her team's first 10 points, but a trey by Jones and a steal and layup by Rowe pushed the margin to 20, 30-10, at the 4:00 mark.

The Jackrabbits then tallied 12 of the next 15 points, slicing the deficit to 11, 33-22, on a pair of Rotert free throws with six seconds left before Elie knocked down a jumper just before the halftime buzzer to give MT a 13-point halftime edge, 35-22.

The momentum remained with the Blue Raiders during the early minutes of the second half, as they quickly outscored South Dakota State 8-2 to push the advantage back to 18, 43-25, on a Rowe layup at 16:11. Waytashek then registered the final four Jackrabbit points as part of an 8-0 spurt, cutting the lead to 12, 45-33, with 11:24 to play.

Lingle kept South Dakota State within 14, 51-37, on a bucket at 8:26, but a 12-5 Middle Tennessee run, capped by consecutive 3-pointers from Lanning, pushed the gap back to a game-high 21, 63-42, with 4:10 remaining.

Young countered with a triple of her own at 2:43, ending a 7-2 Jackrabbit surge to make it a 16-point difference, 65-49, but the visitors would only score once more as the Blue Raiders closed on a 5-2 streak.

Middle Tennessee will return to action when it opens a three-game road swing at 8 p.m. Wednesday at Tennessee Tech in Cookeville, Tenn.

### **Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes**

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

The first eight minutes of the game was the difference. The press we had and our quickness surprised them. They have a very good basketball team. We had some good matches, some good decisions at the center line, and we got a deflection or two, and that bothered them. And we were able to put the ball in the hole.

They got tougher, and we got inconsistent in running our offense. I do not know why, but we will look at the film and see. Transition basketball on the offensive end was the difference. We were able to get Ebony (Rowe) and Ice (Icelyn Elie) loose. I thought that was a big basket at halftime that Tina (Stewart) gave Ice. There were a lot of key things during that game, but I am real proud of our players.

South Dakota State is a lot like the team we had last year. Everybody can score, they have great

basketball IQ, they share the basketball, they have been together a long time. Being a coach, and having played South Dakota State for the last five years, I can tell you right now, this was a big win.

Tina Stewart and Anne Marie Lanning are just doing a tremendous job in leading our basketball team. Anne Marie vocally and Tina doing it with her effort.

Their (the Jackrabbits) size did not bother me as much as their basketball IQ. They are a smart team. Even with a 14-point lead, I did not feel comfortable at all. Number 10 (Jill Young) is a great 3-point shooter, but she went 2-of-6 today, but she is a lot better than that. And 14 (Kristin Rotert) is their heart and soul, and she went 2-of-5 from 3-point range, and I am telling you they are just a great team.

Tina hit a couple of big 3s, Kortni (Jones) had 10 assists today. I doubt seriously if South Dakota State has ever had 38 turnovers. Sometime, I will ask (Coach) Aaron (Johnston) if they have ever had 38 turnovers, but not today.

**Tina Stewart:**

Everything started with our defense. We came out and played with passion and pride, something we did not do against Arkansas. We played together tonight.

Our pressure forced them into turnovers and that got us into our transition game.

**Anne Marie Lanning:**

We had to continue to apply the pressure even after we made that big run (19-0) to start the game. We went into the locker room, and we were excited with what we had done, but we knew that we could not become complacent with that. We knew that they would not give up. They are a hard-nosed team, sound in fundamentals, and their coach gets the best out of them. We knew we had to keep pushing and pushing the second half. We did a good job of starting the second half with a big basket and keeping the momentum.

It feels good to beat them here. Winning is always good, but winning against them means a lot, plus the fact that we did it all together. We played hard and everybody gave it all they had, and that means a lot.

**South Dakota State Postgame Quotes**

**Head coach Aaron Johnston:**

Turnovers were absolutely the story of the game for us. We just did not get into our offense at all the first 10 minutes of the game. The first one came on a three and was more of a broken transition play than us being in good offensive position ready to go. Turnovers just really hurt us and between our two point guards, Jill (Young) and Macie (Michelson), had 16. It all has to do with their press and asking a lot out of our point guards but we tried to have a lot of different looks against it and some of them were forced. Middle Tennessee is aggressive enough that they are going to get some turnovers but we can probably go back and count 15 times where we threw the ball out of bounds or stepped on the line. Our team has to play with a little more mental poise and I think the crowd caused a little trouble. We were rattled out there and it cost us big with the turnovers.

I feel like we worked on it. Every time we play Middle Tennessee, and this is the fifth time we have played them, they press and do the same thing. I feel like we worked on it for two days in practice, watched film on it and they ran the same press last year and we did not seem to have any trouble

with that. Middle would probably argue they were further along last year with more experienced players and depth and now have more young players out there but I do not feel we were caught off guard. We did not handle it very well and had turnovers one-on-one where someone just rips it from you. We see that about every single day whether it be in practice or a game.

Kristen (Rotert) did a good job but turned it over too much too. She started to get aggressive against the press as the game went on and get herself to the free throw line. Honestly, we just did not take care of the ball. When we ran our offense we got some good looks, and in the second half, we got to 12 but really Middle's pressure got to us and they were a big part of us turning it over.

### **Steph Paluch**

They came out tougher and we were not able to handle it.

It was tough but we knew we could chip away slowly. We started to but then we fell apart again. Their pressure got to us and we could not handle it.

Even with the Purdue game and this game, both were good environments, crowds and atmosphere.

We have been talking a lot about effort and focusing, and we need to do a lot better with those. Just focusing on our turnovers, we have had a tremendous amount of turnovers and need to do a better job of taking care of the ball.

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