

Middle Tennessee declaws Kansas State to finish unbeaten at tournament

Blue Raiders finish 2-0 at UTSA Holiday Classic

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SAN ANTONIO – Middle Tennessee broke open a tied game with 11:37 remaining to outscore Kansas State 22-8 down the stretch and pull away for a 63-49 victory over the Wildcats Tuesday afternoon in the Blue Raiders' final game of the UTSA Holiday Classic in San Antonio. Middle Tennessee finishes the in-season tournament, its first since 2006, with a 2-0 record after knocking off St. Bonaventure Monday.

Freshman Ebony Rowe registered her second double-double in as many games by leading all players with 17 points and 10 rebounds. She converted 11-of-15 free throws to go along with four assists and two steals in 33 minutes.

Classmate Jordyn Luffman played the best all-around game of her young career, netting nine points, one shy of her career high, and grabbing a career-best nine rebounds, including seven on the defensive glass. She hit three 3-pointers for her points and played a career-high 34 minutes.

Sophomore Icelyn Elie, who was held scoreless for the first 20 minutes, came out and contributed 14 points in the second half to finish as the second MT player in double figures.

Jalana Childs paced the Wildcats with 15 points and five rebounds, while Taelor Karr joined her in double figures with 11 points.



Neither team was torching the nets early but the Blue Raiders began to warm up midway through the first period. After Kansas State (8-3) took a 4-2 lead on a Branshea Brown jumper at 16:11, Middle Tennessee responded with a 7-0 run, started by a 3-pointer in the corner from Luffman.

The nets stayed open for the Blue Raiders after Brianna Kulas halted the streak with a triple of her own, as MT rattled off a 9-2 spurt, capped by another Luffman trey, to take an 18-9 edge into the final five minutes. The Wildcats went to Childs for their next three field goals but sophomore Kortni Jones drained a long 3-pointer and Rowe went inside to help Middle Tennessee (9-3) build a 25-15 cushion with 2:27 left in the half.

Kansas State, however, used the final two minutes to trim the margin to three via a 7-0 run, including a 3-pointer by Chantay Caron with just 19 seconds to go to send the Blue Raiders into the intermission only up three, 25-22.

Middle Tennessee used the first minute of the second stanza to open a six-point advantage, 28-22, behind a trio of Rowe free throws. After Childs converted an old-fashioned three-point play, senior Anne Marie Lanning came back and put three points back into the Blue Raider net. A 3-pointer from Brittany Chambers cut the deficit to one, 33-32, but Rowe hit another set of free throws.

Karr tied the game on the next Wildcat possession and KSU did not allow MT to open more than a four-point lead during the next five minutes as Karr hit a running layup at 11:37 for the game's third tie, 41-41. From there, Elie took over on the offensive end, scoring six of Middle Tennessee's next seven points and Jones drained a trey to cap a 10-0 spurt, extending the Blue Raider edge to 51-41 with 7:58 remaining.

Caron answered with a jumper, but Luffman got free for another 3-pointer at 6:10 to make it an 11-point difference, 54-43. The lead swelled to 13, 56-43, two-and-a-half minutes later but Brown countered with a jumper at 3:20 for a 56-45 score.

Rowe added a charity toss and junior Tina Stewart added her only points of the game for a 14-point advantage with just over two minutes remaining. JuliAnne Chisholm sank two free throws and Childs added a jumper with 1:21 left, but the 12-point margin would be as close as the Wildcats would get down the stretch.

Middle Tennessee will take over a week off for the holiday season before resuming its season at 5 p.m. Central Wednesday, December 29 at SEC foe Kentucky in Lexington, Ky.

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