Blue Raiders turn attention to Sun Belt action

Will begin conference play at South Alabama Sunday

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – After its win over Tennessee State on Wednesday night the Blue Raiders turned their focus to Sun Belt Conference action in practice on Thursday.

Middle Tennessee will open conference play at South Alabama on Sunday, Jan. 2 at 4:05 p.m. on the back end of a doubleheader with the women's team.

"We know what needs to be done. Now we need to do a better job of it in practice every day. James Washington needs to become a better defender at the point guard spot. We need to get smarter in our point guard play at the end of the game. Rebounding, just all of the toughness stuff," head coach Kermit Davis said. "We work at it, and work at it, and I said this before that I've had to urge this team in practice, more than any team in six or seven years, to be more physical and go. We understand what needs to be done; we've just got to get it done in practice."

The Blue Raiders who have been the best Sun Belt road team since Davis took over the reins beginning with the 2002-03 season. Middle Tennessee has won 37 Sun Belt Conference away games and will be looking for its 38th on Sunday at the Mitchell Center.

"It is not an easy switch to conference games, but I told our team that Tennessee State could finish in the top four or five in our league. They are talented and well coached," Davis said. "We've played a really good non-conference schedule, ranked in the top 60 in the country, so we have been

tested. We've had one "gimme" game, and that was our first NAIA game. Every other team has had a winning record except SIU-Edwardsville, and that's one the road, so we've had a dog-fight every game. Those kind of games, win or losing, will be good experience when conference play starts."

R-sophomore Jason Jones will be a major component for the Blue Raiders against South Alabama as he has really turned a corner offensively in the last six games. During those games, J. Jones has scored 91 points, grabbed 32 rebounds and had six steals. He is currently averaging 12.1 points and 4.2 rebounds per game.

Senior James Washington and sophomore JT Sulton have also aided the offense this season as they are averaging 14.1 and 9.1 points per game respectively. Sulton also leads the team defensively with five rebounds per game.

Middle Tennessee and USA are evenly matched on paper but the Blue Raiders lead the Jags statistically in points per game, rebound margin, steals, field goal percentage, 3-point field goal percentage and free throw percentage.

Tipoff from the Mitchell Center is set for 4:05 p.m. Chip Walters will have the call with Kyle Turnham adding color commentary on the Blue Raider Network and live stats may be found on goblueraiders.com.

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