

# Blue Raiders win No. 700 in conference opener

## Rowe, Lanning each net 26 points

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**MOBILE, Ala.** – Middle Tennessee women's basketball became the 33<sup>rd</sup> program in NCAA history with 700 victories as it opened Sun Belt play with a 67-59 triumph at South Alabama Sunday afternoon inside the Mitchell Center in Mobile, Ala. The Blue Raiders, in the midst of their 36<sup>th</sup> season as a varsity sport since 1975-76, own an all-time mark of 700-342 following the win over the Lady Jags.

Freshman Ebony Rowe continued to dominate her opponents of late, registering her fourth consecutive double-double, and seventh of the season, with a career-high 26 points and career-best tying 16 rebounds, including 11 on the defensive glass. She also added three of Middle Tennessee's five blocked shots and a pair of steals in 33 minutes.



Senior Anne Marie Lanning also played outstanding for the Blue Raiders, netting a career-high tying 26 points, including four 3-pointers, and a 6-of-6 effort at the foul line. She moved within 76 points of 1,000 in her career, leapfrogging four former Middle Tennessee (10-4, 1-0 Sun Belt) players from 33<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> on the school's all-time scoring list. She hit her first eight field goals, including the four from 3-point territory, and finished the first half a perfect 5-of-5 from the field, 3-of-3 from long range and 2-of-2 at the charity stripe.

Classmate Emily Queen made her season debut, earning a start and playing 12 minutes. The Preseason All-Sun Belt Second Team honoree last saw action Jan. 9, 2010, at UALR, 358 days ago.

Christian Shelter paced the Lady Jags with 19 points, connecting one one-half of the team's six treys. The top 3-point shooting team in the conference entering the game, South Alabama finished just 6-of-25 (24.0 percent) from long range. Sarda Peterson and Siedah Banks chipped in 11 points apiece to give the Lady Jags a trio in double figures.

Much like it had faced during the early periods of the first half at No. 11/11 Kentucky Wednesday, the Blue Raiders changed course and were the team that came out on fire, hitting 7-of-8 field goals, including a pair of Lanning triples, to open an 18-8 lead just eight minutes into the game. The lone miss was on the team's opening field goal attempt before it rattled off seven straight.

The hot streak continued as the lead swelled to a dozen before Veronica Cherizol halted the run with a jumper at 9:40 to make it 20-8. Jordyn Luffman and Rowe added buckets before the Lady Jags scored again when Shelter knocked down a 3-pointer with exactly six minutes to play in the half.

Rowe continued to work the lower block, tallying the next two baskets to expand the lead to 26-13 before Shelter converted her second shot in a row for South Alabama (8-6, 0-2 Sun Belt). Luffman and Lanning provided a pair of outside scoring threats during the next two-and-a-half minutes, including the senior's third consecutive triple at 4:04, while Luffman added a pair of free throws 50 seconds later to push the edge to 19, 34-15.

Brittney Rutledge then poured in a pair of shots for the Lady Jags, only to be sandwiched by a couple from Rowe, as the Blue Raiders built a 38-19 advantage with 1:41 to play. Only a set of Lanning charity tosses were added to the MT column before Lauren Walker nailed a 3-pointer on the stanza's final possession to pull South Alabama within 18, 40-22, at the break.

Lanning then opened the second half with her fourth-straight triple before Shelter came to the rescue for the Lady Jags, tallying 10 of her team's next 11 points during a five-minute stretch to trim the deficit to a dozen, 45-33, with 14:44 to play.

The Middle Tennessee lead remained at least 12 over the course of the next six minutes. Rowe ignited a 6-0 streak with a pair of free throws at 8:47 and capped the surge with a layup at 7:21 before Rutledge stopped it 25 seconds later with layup of her own.

Rutledge's points started an 8-0 spurt as South Alabama brought the gap back to single digits at eight, 56-48, with 3:47 to go. Middle Tennessee would only be able to push the lead back to as high as 10 the remainder of the game with a Peterson 3-pointer with just seconds left providing the closest margin down the stretch at seven, 66-59.

The win is MT's ninth in 11 Sun Belt openers, including its seventh consecutive dating back to the 2004-05 campaign.

Rick Insell Live!, the weekly coaches show, kicks off its run at 6 p.m. Monday from Coach's Grill in Murfreesboro. The hour-long show on WGNS (100.5 FM, 101.9 FM, 1450 AM) and WMOT (89.5 FM) features play-by-play voice Dick Palmer and Blue Raider head coach Rick Insell, along with special guests, with questions taken live from the audience, via email at [radio@goblueraiders.com](mailto:radio@goblueraiders.com) or by phone at 1-866-RAIDERS.

Middle Tennessee will continue action at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday when it plays host to North Texas inside the Murphy Center. It will be the first home contest for the Blue Raiders since Dec. 12 when they faced James Madison.

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