Elie leads charge as Blue Raiders ground Warhawks

MT breaks open tight game with late first half run

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Sophomore Icelyn Elie put together her best offensive performance as a Blue Raider Wednesday night, leading the Middle Tennessee women's basketball team to an 87-58 victory over ULM in Sun Belt action inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Elie finished an impressive 12-of-14 from the floor on her way to a career-high 28 points. It also marks the most points by a Blue Raider this season and since All-American Alysha Clark poured in 48 against UALR in last year's Sun Belt Tournament Championship game.

The sophomore topped her previous career best of 25 by adding 4-of-6 free throws to go with eight rebounds, three blocked shots and an assist in 37 minutes.

Senior Anne Marie Lanning, who nearly posted the first double-double of her career by tallying 18 points, including four 3-pointers, and a career-high nine assists, joined her in double figures. She moves into third place on the school's all-time 3-pointers made list with 227, surpassing Heather Prater (1993-96).

Freshmen Ebony Rowe and KeKe Stewart each contributed 13 points with Rowe hauling in a game-best nine rebounds, one shy of her 13th double-double. Sophomore Kortni Jones added a game-high equaling nine assists.

The Warhawks were led by 13 points apiece from Larrie Williams and Elizabeth Torres. Torres added eight assists, two-thirds of her team's total. Sannisha Williams knocked down 6-of-7 field goals for 12 points to give ULM (12-11, 6-4 Sun Belt) a trio in double figures.

Middle Tennessee broke open a close first half with a late period run, outscoring the Warhawks 13-6 during the final 5:12 after Jordan Rawson forced the game's eighth tie with a free throw for a 28-28 score.

Elie countered with a pair of charity tosses and Lanning pushed the margin to five, 33-28, with her third trey of the half, all within the next eight seconds. After Torres converted a pair of free throws of her own, Lanning drained her fourth triple and the lead grew to a half dozen with 4:27 left in the frame.

A Tina Stewart steal and Elie jumper with just under two minutes left gave the Blue Raiders the initial double-digit advantage at 10, 42-32, before Larrie Williams trimmed it back to eight with the final points of the half for a 44-34 MT edge at the break.

Neither team was able to mount more than a four-point lead during the opening 15 minutes, trading who had the advantage or forcing tie scores. Sannisha Williams gave ULM a one-point edge, 23-22, but Lanning answered with her second triple at 10:00 to put Middle Tennessee (19-5, 9-1 Sun Belt) back on top and then added a set of free throws 27 seconds later to push the lead to four, 27-23.

The Warhawks, however, came right back with an Alexar Tugler jumper and pair of Rawson free throws to knot the score at 27 apiece at the 6:34 mark before the Blue Raiders took advantage down the stretch.

The second half began with Middle Tennessee forcing ULM turnovers, including nine in the first 10 minutes, to extend its margin to 31, 71-40. The Blue Raiders used a 12-4 push in the initial 4:12 to widen the gap to 54-38. Post players scored 10 of the dozen points, but Jones capped the surge with a layup after a steal from freshman Jordyn Luffman.

Marion Zollicoffer halted the run with a jumper at 15:28, but the MT defense continued to force the Warhawks into bad shots and 12 consecutive KeKe Stewart points during a period of just over two-and-a-half minutes widened the lead to 33, 73-40, with 9:45 remaining. The 12 points were part of a 19-0 streak by Middle Tennessee before Tugler ended the drought with a jumper at 8:54.

Elie connected on the first of a two-shot foul to give the Blue Raiders their largest cushion at 34, 76-42, at the 7:15 mark, before ULM sliced the lead to 21, 77-56, behind a 14-1 run. Rowe finally ended the Warhawks comeback attempt and Tina Stewart added a pair of 3-pointers, providing MT with a 10-2 surge during the final 2:10 to decide the final margin.

The Blue Raiders' win is the 99th in Sun Belt action for head coach Rick Insell and it snaps ULM's four-game winning streak it had entering the contest.

Middle Tennessee will return to action at 5:30 p.m. Saturday when it plays host to South Alabama in the second game of a Blue Raider doubleheader.

Tickets are also available for the upcoming Sun Belt Tournament, to be held March 5-8 in Hot Springs, Ark., for the third-straight season. Tournament booklets are $83 and can be purchased by

calling the Middle Tennessee ticket office at 1-888-YES-MTSU or stopping by the ticket office at Gate 1A of Floyd Stadium.

Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey will call the action on the Blue Raider Network, WGNS (100.5 FM, 101.9 FM, 1450 AM), WMOT (89.5 FM) and WBRY (96.7 FM, 1540 AM).

The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) will also hold a Diaper Drive on the upper concourse of Murphy Center prior to the game. The group will collect diapers, baby hygiene products and baby food.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Rick Insell

Thirteen turnovers, I am happy with that. I thought we shot the ball well. KeKe Stewart came in and gave Ebony Rowe a rest, and finished five or six times in a row. That was probably the difference in the ball game. Our post players tonight had 28, 13 and 13 (points) and that is not too bad.

On rebounding after first SBC loss
This team is a pretty good basketball team we played tonight. Mona has done a good job. We came out the second half, held them to 24 points, and scored 45, and that is big, to hold that team to 24 points the second half. I was proud of our defensive effort the second half.

We had two good practices on Monday and Tuesday, they were pretty tough. We have got freshmen and sophomores on this team, and they need to know that this is going to be a tough situation, and every game is going to be like this from now on. We have got to cut our turnovers down and use our heads a little more.

On Kortni and Anne Marie having nine assists each
They are a good defensive team and Kortni was able to find that seam on that back side and get the ball to Icelyn Elie early in the second half. Ice caught the ball and was able to finish. That was big time plays by the guard Kortni and by Ice, to catch the ball and score before coming down. Because they were so athletic that if she came down, they were going to crowd her, so she went right on up and finished.

What got her open was a double team on Ebony Rowe. Ebony is drawing so much attention now that she is getting the other kids open.

Icelyn Elie did a good job. She is that type of a player. As good a game as she had tonight, she had that bad of a game down at Florida International, so it was good to see her bounce back and show that she could play.

On Anne Marie Lanning hitting key shots when needed
Anne Marie is a big time player. She is a winner, she has been a winner her whole life, and she does that every game for us, plays 40 minutes. She does what we have to have to win a game, pass the ball, knock down free throws. She had nine assists, 18 points, five rebounds. She did what we had to have. She is the MVP of our team.

But I am going to tell you that Monroe has a very good basketball team.

Senior Anne Marie Lanning

At halftime, Coach talked about the things we needed to work on, we did some good in the first half, but he did not really focus on that. He focused on defense. And we have been working on defense, getting it cohesive, working as one, not just one person doing this. I thought we did a great job of what Coach calls "swimming down" that we work on in practice.

On eight assists in second half
We ran some different plays, and the first thing I am supposed to do look at the post, and KeKe got three or four in a row, and that was big for us, and for my assist total. Finding the open people is what I am supposed to do.

We are all big on telling each to believe in yourself and believe in your shot. I told KeKe to believe in herself, that you can go up against her, and she did. It was big for her.

Sophomore Icelyn Elie

On the start of the game, hitting early shots and getting team going
The main thing was my focus. I was real focused when we started the game, and that is what really got me in it. Other than that, believing in my teammates, and working together as a team was another thing.

ULM Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Mona Martin

It was a very physical game, and I thought Middle Tennessee did a great job. I knew they were going to be ready after losing to FIU. I am very disappointed in our post play and defense tonight. I thought Middle Tennessee's post play was awesome. We let Lanning get going in the first half, but we did a great job on her in the second. The post play is what really hurt us.

Middle Tennessee is tough. We knew it coming in here. In my opinion, they are a Top 25 team, and they will be up there if they keep winning.

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