Post players dominate in win over Lady Jags

Rowe sets freshman rebounding record; Insell wins No. 100 vs. SBC

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee received a combined 45 points from its post starters, nearly equaling the entire South Alabama team total, in a 71-48 triumph over the visiting Lady Jags Saturday evening inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Freshman Ebony Rowe tallied a game-high 24 points, while sophomore Icelyn Elie contributed 21 as the pair combined to shoot 19-of-33 for the contest and a perfect 7-of-7 at the foul line. They added 17 rebounds, four steals, three blocked shots and two assists on the night in leading the Blue Raiders to the 100th overall Sun Belt victory for head coach Rick Insell.

Rowe also became the school's single-season record holder for rebounds by a freshman with her eight, increasing her total to 243 and surpassing the old mark of 241 established by Ester Coleman in 1979-80. Rowe is closing in on another rookie standard, needing 13 free throw attempts to match the mark set by Priscilla Robinson in 1990-91.

Meanwhile on the perimeter, senior Anne Marie Lanning, who was honored pregame for recently joining the 1,000-point club, buried 15 points to give Middle Tennessee (19-5, 10-1 Sun Belt) a trio in double figures. The 15 points enable her to jump from 24th in school history to 21st, passing three

former Blue Raiders on her way to 1,066 points in her career. She leapfrogged Jessica Beaty (1994-97), Chelsia Lymon (2007-10) and Carlita Elder (1996-99) in her climb on the all-time scoring list.

Middle Tennessee shot 50.0 percent from the field for the game, while converting a season-high 13-of-14 (92.9 percent) at the charity stripe, including knocking down all eight attempts in the second half.

South Alabama (13-10, 5-6 Sun Belt) did not have a player reach double figures, as Siedah Banks topped the squad with nine points. Sarda Peterson chipped in eight, while Christian Shelter, the team's leading scorer coming in at 12.4 ppg, was held to just two on 1-of-11 from the floor.

Shelter grabbed a team-best five caroms, all on the defensive glass, but it was not enough as MT won the battle on the boards, 37-25.

The Blue Raiders raced out a 7-2 start during the opening six minutes, keyed by a Lanning old-fashioned three-point play to begin the game just 18 seconds into the contest. Freshman KeKe Stewart pushed the lead to seven, 12-5, at 12:29, but a pair of Lady Jag 3-pointers, one each by Lauren Walker and Vannessa Simmons trimmed the deficit back to one, 12-11, with 9:24 to go in the period.

Lanning countered with a jumper and Middle Tennessee was off on a 9-0 spurt over the next two minutes, extending the margin to 10, 21-11, with 7:03 left. Elie added an old-fashioned three-point play of her own a minute later for an 11-point edge, 26-15.

South Alabama trimmed it back to nine twice in the next three minutes, but after Taylor Ammons made it a 28-19 MT advantage, the Blue Raiders outscored the Lady Jags 10-4 over the last 4:16, including a coast-to-coast steal and layup by sophomore Kortni Jones, to send Middle Tennessee into the intermission ahead, 38-23.

The second half began with a 12-5 Blue Raider run, capped by a Rowe jumper at 15:39, to widen the gap to 20, 50-30. Four of the South Alabama points came during the first minute, as Peterson hit the back-end of a two-shot foul and Brittany Rutledge connected on a 3-pointer.

The Lady Jags attempted to claw back into the contest, using an 8-2 surge the next four minutes to slice the deficit to 14, 52-38, with 11:31 remaining.

Middle Tennessee then reversed the tide and mounted a 15-2 run of its own to take a game-high 27-point advantage, 67-40, following a pair of Rowe charity tosses at the 3:31 mark. Ronneka Robertson kick-started a game-ending, 8-3, South Alabama streak down the stretch.

The Blue Raiders will return to action when they travel to rival Western Kentucky for a 7:30 p.m. Wednesday tip in Bowling Green, Ky. Middle Tennessee currently owns a three-game lead in the standings over Western Kentucky and has won the last five meetings between the two schools.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Rick Insell

Again, the post play of Icelyn and Ebony, that is 45 points, and Anne Marie doing her thing. We went to the boards fairly decently, 37-25, and they are a pretty athletic team, but we have to do a better

job defensively. Twenty-three and 25 points we can live with, but we should have scored more than 33 the second half. We won the game, and everybody is healthy, and I am happy.

On Ebony Rowe setting freshman rebounding record, was that a surprise?
No, when I saw her in the Kentucky-Indiana All-Star Game this past summer, and I saw how she dominated the players in that state, I said right then that she would be a factor in this conference. She is a hard worker, and we have ridden her every game. We go right to her the first possession, and she just seems to be getting better and stronger.

On combination of Ebony and Icelyn
We did not shoot the ball very well. Ice was 8-of-13 and Ebony was 11-of-20, and of those misses, I thought we should have made six of them. We have to get a little mentally tougher.

Sometimes we take things for granted, but I am happy with the way both of them are playing, and I am happy with the way Keke (Stewart) is coming in and doing a good job. We need to bring Lauren March along. But our outside game, with Tina (Stewart), Anne Marie, Kortni and Jordyn (Luffman) are doing a good job.

We have just got to stay healthy. We have a tough schedule ahead of us, and going to Western, it is going to be a tough game.

On Western Kentucky game
Western has a lot of tradition and a passion for the game of basketball, and we respect them for that. We like playing them, it is a big game, it means a lot, I guess because we are an hour and 15 minutes away from each other. They are like our fans. I think we have overtaken their fans where attendance is concerned. I think our fans now have a passion for winning, they have a passion for the Lady Raiders. We just keep growing, and that is what we want, and that is what makes it a rivalry.

They are a good team. They have two players, (Amy) McNear and (Arnika) Brown, that everybody in the conference voted first team all-conference in the preseason. They are the only team out there that had two first team players. Emily (Queen) made second team, but she is not playing.

I am real proud of our kids. They are playing hard, they are playing with a lot of enthusiasm, getting better every day in practice, and we are getting more crisp in running our offense than we were. We did not finish as well as I would have liked, but we were very crisp in running our offense, and in handling different situations. I thought Anne Marie gave us great leadership on the floor.

Freshman Ebony Rowe

On breaking freshman rebounding record
I guess you can never expect to be so successful right off the bat. When Coach Insell first recruited me, he talked about how he wanted me to come out really strong, so he instilled that in us early. It really does not matter if we are freshmen or not, he got us ready before the season even started, so we came out playing more like sophomores and juniors than freshmen and sophomores.

What does it mean to you to have the freshman rebounding record at MT?
It is a real honor just because I know that rebounding is something that I take pride in, because it is about hard work. Our whole team focuses on out-rebounding the other team.

When we started the game, we missed a couple of chip shots, and we heard it from Coach pretty bad, and then at halftime he was still harping on it. But that is one thing about our team, we have so many different weapons. If you shut us (Icelyn and I) down, our perimeter is going to hit shots. If you shut me down, Ice is going to step up and she is going to work in the paint. We knew they were going to shut down our threes, so our guards did a great job of getting us the ball inside tonight.

On recent play of Icelyn Elie
It is huge to have Ice under there with me. Coach even said that, 'Ice, they are doubling off of your man', so I told her before the game, 'Ice, you cut to the basket and I am going to give it to you', and we did that a couple of times tonight. It helps our team overall, because they can not double us anymore because we have so many people that can score.

On going to Bowling Green as a Blue Raider
I know about the rivalry. I am from Bowling Green, my parents went to Western, so my family will probably take up half the crowd anyway. It comes down to pride, and both teams have so much pride in their schools, and that is why it is always a real competitive game. I think we are all looking forward to it. We are going to work hard for when we go down there next week.

My parents are going to yell for us. They were in Bowling Green this morning eating at Cracker Barrel and they had on their MT stuff, and everybody was looking at them funny. Mom told them she had to cheer for her girl.

Sophomore Icelyn Elie

On following up career-high 28 points vs. ULM with 21 today
I am really focusing more on being more consistent from here on out. Coach has really been pounding on me to be more consistent.

On MT-WKU rivalry
Both teams are really good, both are competitive, you just have to go in with the right focus.

South Alabama Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Rick Pietri

They are really flippin' good. Middle Tennessee is really flippin' good. I do not really have much to say. I mean with Rowe, Elie and Lanning, that is three all-conference players right there. They are really good.

We were not tough enough tonight. Our two leading scorers went 4-of-20 with some good looks. It is just mental right now with them. It is tough when your two leading scorers, who you have relied on all year, are having difficulties getting a basket. That puts a lot of pressure on the rest of the team, who are not used to having to get baskets. That is kind of where we are right now.

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