Middle Tennessee drops final road game of regular season

Rowe leads all players with 18 points

February 20, 2011 · Athletic Communications

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Middle Tennessee's first half rally to take a halftime lead could not be maintained in the second 20 minutes, as West Division champion UALR knocked off the Blue Raiders 69-61 Sunday afternoon in Sun Belt Conference women's basketball action inside the Jack Stephens Center in Little Rock, Ark. The meeting between the two-top programs in the league with Middle Tennessee already clinching the East Division title for the third-straight season, was featured on the Sun Belt Network TV package.

The Blue Raiders placed three players in double figures, led by freshman Ebony Rowe's 18. Joining her in double digits were senior Anne Marie Lanning with 16 and freshman KeKe Stewart with 15, both hitting a pair of 3-pointers. Rowe hauled in a game-high eight rebounds, one more than sophomore Icelyn Elie, as Middle Tennessee (22-6, 13-2 Sun Belt) won the battle on the glass, 32-27.

Marian Kursh paced the Trojans with 17 points, one basket more than Shanika Butler and Chastity Reed's 15. Reed, the preseason conference player of the year and league's leading scorer, netted 11 of her total after the intermission. Britteni Williams tallied a dozen points to give UALR (18-6, 12-1 Sun Belt) four players in double figures.

The Blue Raiders struggled out of the gate, committing nine turnovers and making only one of the first five field goal attempts in the opening eight minutes, as the Trojans built a 12-2 lead, all on points from Kursh and Butler. Rowe finally ended the drought with a layup at 12:09 and it ignited a 14-2 MT spurt during the next seven minutes with Lanning registering the final eight points, including a triple at 5:02 to cap the run, and pulling Middle Tennessee within two, 16-14.

Within the next minute, UALR pushed its edge back to six and maintained the same differential until Rowe scored a layup and Stewart drained the first of her two treys to slice the margin to one, 22-21, with 2:41 to play in the stanza. Kursh quickly made it a three-point game once again, but four consecutive free throws by Rowe put the Blue Raiders on top for the first time, 25-24, with 1:41 to go. Stewart then added her second 3-pointer 45 seconds later, extending the lead to four. Butler knocked down a layup before freshman Jordyn Luffman converted two free throws to send MT into the break ahead, 30-26.

Luffman added another charity toss to begin the second half before Butler hit a layup and Janette Merriex forced the game's second tie at 31-31 with a triple at 18:24. The score would be knotted one more time before UALR embarked on a 10-2 surge, started by an old-fashioned three-point play from Reed, to take a 43-35 lead with 12:42 remaining.

The Blue Raider deficit grew to 11, 48-37, two minutes later, but again Middle Tennessee attempted a comeback. The Blue Raiders tallied 14 of the next 19 points, trimming the gap to two, 53-51, as back-to-back 3-pointers from junior Tina Stewart and Lanning capped the streak. Williams and Tina Stewart traded layups to keep Middle Tennessee within a possession entering the under-eight media timeout at 6:03.

Kursh notched the next four points and Rolfe added another layup, as the Trojans swelled their advantage back to eight, 61-53, with 4:11 to play. The lead stayed eight when Reed picked up her fifth foul at the 1:49 mark.

Elie hit both free throws, pulling the Blue Raiders within six once again, but they would get no closer, as UALR pushed its lead to as high as 10 down the stretch before Lanning's layup with four seconds left decided the final margin.

The two teams combined to shoot 46 free throws, as 37 fouls were called, including a technical on each head coach late in the second half.

Middle Tennessee will return to action in one week when it closes the regular season and the home schedule at 3 p.m. Sunday against rival Western Kentucky inside the Murphy Center. The matchup will also be broadcast on the Sun Belt Network, the fourth time this season MT will be featured on the league's TV package.

Blue Raider fans are also invited to the final Rick Insell Live! weekly radio show, held this week from 6-7 p.m. Wednesday, at Coach's Grill in Murfreesboro. The show has been moved back two days due to the men's basketball team's travel plans for a game Tuesday night in Houston.

Tickets are available for the Sun Belt Tournament, to be held March 6-8 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.

Printed on June 19, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/51351