

Another exhibition domination for Blue Raiders

Rowe contributes game-high 30 points

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Middle Tennessee put a cap on its women's basketball exhibition season with an emphatic 127-55 victory over Martin Methodist Monday night inside the historic Murphy Center. The Blue Raiders netted 75 points in the second half on their way to what would have been a single-game school record scoring output had the game counted.

Preseason co-Sun Belt Player of the Year Ebony Rowe led all players with 30 points, hitting 12 field goals, while junior Kortni Jones added a triple-double of 25 points, 13 assists and 10 steals. She hit five of Middle Tennessee's 13 3-pointers and added more assists and steals than the Redhawk team totals.

Also contributing double-figure points for the Blue Raiders were Preseason All-Sun Belt Second Team pick Icelyn Elie with 21 and sophomore Laken Leonard with 13 off the bench, sparked by three triples.



Vee Young paced Martin Methodist with 23 points and 10 rebounds, the only player the NAIA school had in double digits. Unfortunately for the Redhawks, they turned the ball over 45 times compared to just 16 for MT, as the Blue Raiders swiped 27 steals.

Jones scored the game's opening six points, helping Middle Tennessee race out to a 9-0 lead before Ellen Pointer converted the first of a two-shot free throw set at 14:31 to finally put Martin

Methodist on the board. Elie hit the next four points and a Jones 3-pointer on the possession following the under-12 media timeout increased the Blue Raider advantage to 17, 20-3.

Redshirt sophomore Lauren March pushed the lead to 19, 22-3, on the next Middle Tennessee trip down the floor. The Redhawks then mounted a 6-0 run over the next minute, capped by a pair of Charmika Franklin charity tosses, to pull within 13 at the 9:52 mark.

Martin Methodist kept it at a 13-point difference two-and-a-half minutes later before Jones hit consecutive treys to push the edge back to 19, 32-13, with 6:45 left in the first half. Freshman Shanice Cason knocked down a 3-pointer of her own 26 seconds later as the lead swelled to 20 for the first time.

After Young hit a pair of free throws at 5:58 to trim the advantage to 18, 35-17, the Blue Raiders used a 17-4 down the stretch to push their halftime cushion to 31, 52-21.

The initial 27 points of the second half fell in Middle Tennessee's favor, as it quickly built a 79-21 edge following a Rowe layup at 14:48. During the next three minutes, Elie poured in seven points and Rowe added an old-fashioned three-point play to expand the margin to 60, 91-31, with 11:27 remaining.

Just over two minutes later, junior Jamila Ajanaku nailed a jumper to make it a 63-point lead and Jones drained another triple at the 8:29 mark to push the Blue Raiders over the century plateau, 101-37.

The margin stayed in the 60s until redshirt freshman Stephanie Myers scored her first Middle Tennessee points with a jumper in the lane at 4:31 to increase the Redhawk deficit to 70, 114-44. Leonard fed Jones for her final 3-pointer at 3:57 for a 117-46 lead but the next five points, all coming at the foul line, would register in the Martin Methodist column over the next minute.

Sophomore Janay Brinkley halted the run with a triple and Leonard added one of her own before she connected on a pair of charity tosses to push the lead to a game-high 74, 125-51, with 1:14 left. Senior Molly McFadden added two free throws to close the Blue Raider scoring and Pointer knocked down the second of two free tosses of her own with 29 seconds to play for the final score.

Middle Tennessee will return to action at 7 p.m. Central Friday when it travels to University Park, Pa., to compete in the regular-season opening Lady Lion Classic, hosted by No. 12/14 Penn State. The Blue Raiders will face UNC Wilmington in their first game of the tournament before battling either Washington State or the host Nittany Lions at 11 a.m. Central Sunday in the second contest.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes

HEAD COACH RICK INSELL:

We ran the floor and that's about it. We didn't want to show anything but our base stuff because we still have two games this week. A time or two we thought about going to other things, but we've got a pretty tough game with UNC Wilmington on Friday, and then probably Penn State on Sunday. We've got our wagon loaded.

About all this did tonight was help us with conditioning. We did a better job in the second half of rebounding the ball with authority, executing our offense and shooting the 3. I don't know why we

came out in the first half like we did, but we can't come out and win basketball games and do that, especially the competition we are going to have to play.

We shot better in the second half; Ebony shot her free throws better, we knocked down some 3s better, that's what we really wanted to get out of this game. Still, we didn't rebound the ball with authority, and against teams like that, if we can't rebound the ball with authority, we are going to have problems when we face the bigger teams.

Laken (Leonard), is talented, and so is Janay Brinkley, and so is Jamila Ajanaku. I've just got to break the code on all three of them and I haven't done that yet.

Maybe a shot or two will give them confidence, but Laken hit over 30,000 3s this summer, so she should know where the basket is at. Jamila has got so much talent, it's just bubbling over, but she had five turnovers, and we can't live with that. She's got to do a better job of taking care of the basketball, and she will. The competition we have to play, we are going to need Jamila Ajanaku before this year's over.

On Shanice Cason

Our best lineup is Shanice at the 1 and Kortni Jones at the 2, but when we do that, we are looking at foul situations there with either one of them, and with conditioning with both of them. When we get down the stretch, we have two point guards, and that's it. Our third guard would be Jamila, and right now, I'm not ready to put her in that situation. That's our best lineup, and maybe when we get down to the last seven or eight minutes of a game, you may see that more. Right now we need Kortni playing the one instead of rotating into the two.

EBONY ROWE:

I think we started off kinda sloppy, and everyone saw that, and going into halftime, we weren't pleased with our performance. I think we started picking it up and growing as a team a little in the second half and overall it got better.

On forcing 45 turnovers

I think that was the only thing that we really worked on in practice. We only touched the ball a few times. We really emphasized defense, and getting deflections, getting steals, so that was one thing we really wanted to focus on, and I think we did that.

On being ready for the start of the new season

I think we are. Coach has really been stressing mental toughness, especially with this team, and we have a lot of different looks with this team this year. I think the girls are trying to get focused, and we know what we have to do this year, and we are going to take it one game at a time. I think we will be ready.

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