Middle Tennessee drops road game at James Madison

Elie contributes double-double of 12 pts., 10 rebs.

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HARRISONBURG, Va. – Middle Tennessee fell behind early and never recovered Sunday afternoon, falling 60-46, at James Madison inside the JMU Convocation Center in Harrisonburg, Va., in non-conference women's basketball action. Junior Icelyn Elie, a Preseason All-Sun Belt Second Team pick, led the Blue Raiders with her second double-double of the campaign. She netted 12 points, half of which came at the charity stripe, and grabbed a game-high tying 10 rebounds, including eight defensively. It marks her second double-double in as many games against the Dukes. Sophomore Ebony Rowe, a Preseason co-Sun Belt Player of the Year, contributed a team-best 14 points to give Middle Tennessee a pair in double figures. James Madison was led by 18 from Jasmine Gill, while Kirby Burkholder recorded 14 and Lauren Whitehurst also finished with a double-double of 11 points and 10 caroms. The Blue Raiders jumped out in front behind a pair of short buckets from Rowe, claiming a 4-2 edge at 17:57. However, the Dukes roared back by scoring the next eight, led off by a pair of 3-pointers from Burkholder within a minute to push their lead to 10-4 at the 16:41 mark. The JMU run reached 10 on a Tarik Hislop field goal but Elie halted the streak with an inside look at 14:29, trimming the margin to six, 12-6. But, Whitehurst answered on the next Duke possession before Rowe started a 4-0 spurt to pull the Blue Raiders within four, 14-10, with 9:51 left. Whitehurst would add an old-fashioned three-point play,

increasing the deficit to seven, before Lauren March tear-dropped one around the rim at the 6:28 mark. Debbie Smith buried a 3-pointer on the next James Madison (4-0) possession, igniting an 8-0 run during the next two minutes to push the home advantage to 13, 25-12, at the under-four media timeout as Tanica Anderson capped the run with a triple of her own. Jamila Ajanaku would net the next two Middle Tennessee (2-2) baskets, including a turn-around 15-footer at 2:55, and Janay Brinkley contributed a corner 3-pointer with 33 seconds left in the period for a 7-0 Blue Raider streak, cutting the deficit to eight, 27-19. However, Burkholder drained a buzzer-beating trey to make it an 11-point cushion at the intermission. After being inserted into the starting five to open the second 20 minutes, Dymon Raynor hit the first Middle Tennessee basket of the stanza at 18:26. The two teams would trade conversions to open the second half until the under-16 media timeout at 15:38. Rowe would knock down the next two Blue Raider field goals during the next minute, countering another Burkholder trey, to keep MT within 10, 37-27, with 11:55 to play. Laken Leonard canned a 3-pointer to start a 5-0 run, slicing the margin in half, and it stayed that difference after two free throws from Hislop at 10:35. However, Gill and Toia Giggetts added the next points for JMU, as it built a 14-point edge, 48-34, on a 9-0 spurt during the next three-and-a-half minutes. Elie finally ended the drought at the 6:25 mark, but the lead remained 16 with 3:53 remaining. Elie knocked down a pair of free throws with 2:09 left but the Blue Raiders would get no closer down the stretch. The game marked the first career start for Ajanaku, who finished with four points, two rebounds and an assist in 20 minutes. Middle Tennessee returns to action at 7 p.m. Wednesday when it plays host to Tennessee Tech inside the historic Murphy Center. Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey will have all the action on the Blue Raider Network (WMOT – 89.5 FM and WGNS – 1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM).

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