MT wins second straight for first time this season

Blue Raiders place trio in double-figure scoring

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JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. – Middle Tennessee women's basketball has put together its first back-to-back victories of the campaign after it earned a 78-63 victory at ETSU Saturday afternoon inside the MSHA Athletic Center in Johnson City, Tenn. Three Blue Raiders reached double figures, led by junior Kortni Jones' 19 points. She knocked down a career-high six 3-pointers and added six assists. Sophomore Ebony Rowe collected her third double-double of the year with 14 points and a game-best 14 rebounds, including eight on the defensive glass. Junior Icelyn Elie was the final MT player to reach the plateau, pouring in 15 points, including 5-of-6 at the foul line, and nearly posting a double-double of her own with nine caroms. Middle Tennessee swiped 17 steals among the 27 ETSU turnovers, converting them into 26 points. Cara Bowling topped the Lady Bucs with 12 points off the bench, their only player to score in double digits. Destiny Mitchell hauled in an ETSU-high eight rebounds, helping her team win the battle on the glass, 46-44. Natalie Pickwell helped the Lady Bucs jump out to a 5-0 start with her first 3-pointer at 18:37 before Jones answered with four straight to bring the Blue Raiders within one less than a minute later. The two teams continued to trade baskets and shared a 10-10 tie at the under-16 media timeout. Coming out of the break, Bowling was fouled taking a 3-pointer. She made the front and back ends of the three-shot foul and then added a layup to push ETSU (0-5) ahead by four. However, Middle Tennessee capitalized on a

scoring drought as Lauren March drained consecutive triples, followed by a Rowe layup at 12:03, to put the Blue Raiders on top, 18-14. A pair of Tarita Gordon free throws cut it to two before Jones launched another trey and Pickwell added an offensive rebound follow-up to make it a 21-18 edge with 8:38 remaining. The margin swelled to seven during the next two minutes before the Lady Bucs scored again and then grew to nine, 32-23, following two-straight 3-pointers from Leonard entering the final media timeout of the period. An Iesha Robinson triple helped ETSU cut the deficit to four, 32-28, but Middle Tennessee (4-2) would not allow the hosts to get any closer the remainder of the half. Jones converted another 3-pointer with just under a minute to play and Elie scored a 10-footer in the lane just before the buzzer to send the Blue Raiders into the intermission ahead 11, 41-30. Middle Tennessee continued to push offensively during the early stretches of the second half, as Elie netted seven of the first nine points and the defense held the Lady Bucs off the board until nearly four minutes had passed to claim a 50-32 edge at the under-16 media timeout. KeKe Stewart connected on a jumper in the lane 30 seconds later, increasing the difference to 20. Robinson answered with another 3-pointer but the Blue Raiders would build their lead to 21, 59-38, on a Janay Brinkley trey at the 12:41 mark. However, ETSU mounted a 9-2 spurt during the next four minutes to trim the deficit to 14, 61-47. The next five minutes witnessed Middle Tennessee increasing its cushion back to a game-high 24, 78-54, as Shanice Cason tallied seven-straight points and Jones posted another 3-pointer with 3:59 to play. Her conversion would be the final MT points on the day, as the Lady Bucs closed the game with a 9-0 run, starting with a Brianna Bogard triple coming out of the under-four minute timeout. The Blue Raiders return to action as they close a three-game swing against in-state opponents by traveling to Knoxville, Tenn., for a 6 p.m. Central start at No. 6/7 Tennessee. The meeting with the Lady Vols will be broadcast regionally on SportSouth (Comcast channel 26 in Murfreesboro) and also on the Blue Raider Network with Dick Palmer handling play-by-play.

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