Comeback falls just short against Razorbacks

MT began home stretch Saturday night against SEC foe

December 3, 2011 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Middle Tennessee rallied to take the lead with under four minutes left but a 10-point halftime deficit proved to be too much, as the Blue Raiders dropped a 59-53 decision to visiting Arkansas Saturday night inside the historic Murphy Center in non-conference women's basketball action.

Middle Tennessee was led by sophomore and Preseason Sun Belt co-Player of the Year Ebony Rowe, who posted her fourth double-double of the season, and 20th of her career, with a game-high tying 15 points and game-best 12 rebounds. She was joined in double figures by junior Kortni Jones, who finished with 12 points, including three 3-pointers, to go along with her seven assists.

Sophomore Janay Brinkley also poured in a career-high eight points, including a pair of 3-pointers, as the MT bench outscored Arkansas' 15-13.

The Razorbacks placed a trio of starters in double-figure scoring, paced by 15, including 6-of-7 free throws, from Sarah Watkins. Dominique Robinson (13 points) and C'eira Ricketts (12) also contributed to the effort. Robinson hauled in a team-best six boards.

The Blue Raiders found themselves down 29-19 at the intermission after converting only 35.0 percent of their field goals in the opening 20 minutes. The lead swelled to 12, 40-28, by the 14:23 mark on a Quistelle Williams jumper but freshman Shanice Cason answered at the other end with a triple 17 seconds later to start a 10-3 run over the next five-and-a-half minutes as Middle Tennessee

(4-4) pulled within five, 43-38, on a Jones trey.

After Williams halted the momentum with a jumper 30 seconds later, 3-pointers by Brinkley and junior Icelyn Elie sandwiched a Robinson bucket to make it a one possession game at 47-44 with 5:02 left.

Watkins pushed it back to five a short time later, however, Rowe dropped in an old-fashioned three-point play for a 49-47 score with 4:28 remaining. Following an Arkansas (6-1) turnover, Jones drained her second triple of the period to give the Blue Raiders their only lead, 50-49, with 3:47 to go.

Williams hit the second of a two-shot foul at 2:59 to force the game's only tie and help the Razorbacks finish with a 9-3 spurt, as MT could only manage three Rowe free throws, all on separate trips to the line, in the waning minutes.

Arkansas had claimed an early 5-0 lead behind three points from Ashley Daniels, holding the Blue Raiders off the board until Jones' first 3-pointer at 14:55. Three minutes later Lyndsay Harris increased the margin to eight, 13-5, with a triple and Watkins helped push it to a dozen, 16-8, following her own trey and then a jumper with 9:46 to play in the opening stanza.

Brinkley and Rowe would help Middle Tennessee claw back to an eight-point difference but again, the Razorbacks hit a 3-pointer, this time by Robinson, to extend it back to double digits. Brinkley's corner trey at the 3:47 mark dropped the margin to eight and Arkansas was not able to make it more than a 10-point edge the remainder of the period, capping the scoring with a Ricketts jumper with 1:20 left.

The Blue Raiders return home for their second of seven home games out of eight in December when they play host to Austin Peay at 7 p.m. Tuesday. The contest will be broadcast on the Blue Raider Network of WMOT (89.5 FM) and WGNS (1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM) with Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey on the call.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes:

HEAD COACH RICK INSELL
If we don't go out there and play tentative the first half, it would have been a lot better ball game. We couldn't execute any of our offenses, we just didn't trust them and weren't getting in them, and when we finally started trusting them, we had people open all over the floor and we knocked down some shots.

You have to hit free throws and we were 9 of 19. You have to rebound and we outrebounded them, 32-31.

On Arkansas defense
We knew they were going to double Ebony and they did, and we didn't pick up our other people that were open. We'd kind of force-feed things, and we can't do that. I don't know why, but we still try to do it. We just have to go back to the drawing board and keep working.

On clock management in regard to the 30-second clock
We did a very poor job recognizing the time and where we were at. Very poor job.

On finally taking the lead late in the game
I felt all along that we should have been in the game in the first half but we didn't trust or execute our offense. I'm disappointed because that was one of the things we've been working on. We had a chance right here to get a win and we just didn't do the things we needed to do.

KORTNI JONES:
Coach had been on us the past week about trusting our offense and it was kind of like we do our own thing and not sticking to the principles and fundamentals of what he wants. It's hard when we decided to do it at the end, when you look back and know that you could have done it the first half and we wouldn't have been in this situation.

What was Arkansas doing that caused shot-clock violations?
From me having been a point guard, I know how hard it is when someone is pressuring you full-court. You never want to go too fast, but you also don't want to go too slow. It eats time off the clock when you have someone pressuring you at point guard. You don't want to make a turnover rushing too fast. We never caught sight of how much time we had left once we got into our offense. A lot of times we were ready to enter the ball to the post, and we only had five seconds left. This week I feel like we'll practice a lot recognizing how much time is left on the clock.

EBONY ROWE
What do you need to do differently to close games out?
Our biggest thing is playing a full 40 minutes and when we pick up the intensity, we can hang with any team in the country. We just have to work on the whole team playing a full 40-minute game and I really think we can beat anybody.

On playing against 6-3 Sarah Watkins
We knew she was really foul-prone, so the guards started getting us the ball on the post and getting them in foul trouble, so they had to leave the game, and that really favored us.

Printed on May 23, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/57049