

Middle Tennessee puts away Xavier with second-half push

Insell moves into third place on wins list

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CINCINNATI – Middle Tennessee outscored Xavier by 15 in the second half, using a late first-half run as momentum, to claim a 65-49 victory over the Musketeers Friday night inside the Cintas Center in Cincinnati in the Blue Raiders' lone December road game. Sophomore Ebony Rowe powered the Blue Raiders to the win, registering her third-straight double-double with game-highs of 24 points and 13 rebounds. She added five steals, three assists and was the only MT player to attempt free throws, while playing the full 40 minutes. Ten of her caroms came on the offensive glass, helping her team earn a 33-30 edge on the boards. Junior Kortni Jones pitched in 18 points, all coming on 3-pointers, as she tied her career best with six triples. She combined with freshman Shanice Cason to distribute 14 of the team's 21 assists on 26 field goals.

Cason handed out a career-high nine assists to go with her eight points. Xavier was led by 15 points from Lynette Holmes, featuring a 4-of-4 effort at the foul line. Amber Gray gave the Musketeers a pair in double-figure scoring, contributing 12 points, but only two after halftime. She was a perfect 6-of-6 at the charity stripe. Middle Tennessee also took advantage of 27 Xavier turnovers, converting them into 29 points. The Blue Raiders jumped out to an early 5-0 lead after Jones knocked down a triple and Laken Leonard moved towards the baseline for a 12-footer. However, Gray quickly brought the Musketeers back, scoring four-straight points, including a pair of free throws at 16:33, to make it a



one-point difference at the under-16 media timeout. The Xavier offense continued to warm up and the Middle Tennessee attack cooled during the next four minutes. After the Musketeers claimed a 6-5 lead on a pair of Holmes charity tosses at 15:03, Gray scored four of her team's next eight points in a 10-2 run as it extended its margin to 14-7. Rowe would convert the Blue Raiders' first field goal since Leonard's jumper at 12:05 but after an Icelyn Elie layup 35 seconds later, the offense again would struggle. Xavier (3-5) took advantage of the lull in the offense, tallying seven-straight points to extend its edge to 10, 23-13, before Rowe scored again. Her conversion kick-started Middle Tennessee into gear, as Cason hit a top-of-the-key trey at 5:41 to start a 17-6 spurt the remainder of the period to give the Blue Raiders a 30-29 edge at the intermission. After Rowe knocked down the initial basket of the second stanza, Holmes scored twice and Jessica Pachko added another to give Xavier a 35-32 lead at 17:56. Jones then started to torch the nets, draining three consecutive 3-pointers, keeping MT in the game, with the last forcing a 41-41 tie at the 15:38 mark. Following a pair of Holmes free throws, Rowe began a 9-0 Blue Raider spurt, including another Jones triple in addition to two turnaround jumpers from KeKe Stewart, to give Middle Tennessee (6-4) a 50-43 lead and causing the Musketeers to call two timeouts in a 30-second span before the under-12 minute media timeout. Stewart stepped out to hit a 3-pointer of her own, but Holmes answered at the other end to keep it a seven-point margin. Rowe went to work inside, scoring six of the next nine Blue Raider points, with Cason adding a corner triple, as MT saw its lead swell to 16, 62-46, as the six-minute mark was passed. Neither team managed to add to its totals during the next two minutes, but Elie jump-shot a close-range layup on a Cason assist with 3:52 left to cap a 21-3 surge over the preceding 12 minutes. Hawkes finally ended Xavier's drought with a trey six seconds later but only a Rowe free throw down the stretch would determine the final score. The win is the 154th in the career of head coach Rick Insell, moving him into sole possession of third place on the school's all-time list. Middle Tennessee will return to action at 2 p.m. Sunday when it plays host to Georgia Tech inside the historic Murphy Center. The contest can be heard on the Blue Raider Network with Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey on the call on WMOT (89.5 FM) and WGNS (1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM). It also can be seen on ESPN3.com, as Chip Walters and Kyle Turnham will handle the play-by-play and analysis, respectively.

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