

# Balanced scoring puts away old rival

## Season-high point total against Tennessee State

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### **MURFREESBORO, Tenn. –**

Middle Tennessee placed four players in double-figure scoring for the first time since February as it showed no rust after a week-long break in a 94-53 dominating win over Tennessee State Sunday afternoon inside the historic Murphy Center. The Blue Raiders shot a season-high 56.9 percent from the floor, again a mark not achieved since February, and tallied 47 points in each half in the two teams' first meeting since 2003.

Junior Kortni Jones paced the attack with 24 points, including five 3-pointers, while handing out eight assists. Sophomore Ebony Rowe converted 10-of-12 field goals for 21 points, while tying junior Icelyn Elie and classmate Janay Brinkley for game-high honors with four steals.

Junior Icelyn Elie contributed 20 points and 10 rebounds for her third double-double of the season, and sixth of her career. It marks the first time since Jan. 30, 2010, that three different Middle Tennessee (7-5) players scored at least 20 points.

Freshman Shanice Cason rounded out the effort with a career-best 14 points to go along with her seven assists to zero turnovers.

The Tigers were led by 16 points, including four of the team's six free throws, from Tayla Foster off the bench. Kim Haynes and Jasmin Shuler each chipped in nine points, while Alana Morris hauled in a team-high seven rebounds.



The Blue Raiders jumped out to a quick 3-0 lead behind a triple from Laken Leonard and Elie added a jumper before Haynes finally put Tennessee State (4-7) on the board with a trey of her own at 18:14 from the top of the key. Cason then scored six points in a 12-2 spurt over the next three-and-a-half minutes as the lead swelled to 17-5, capped by a pair of layups from the rookie.

Cason remained an integral part of the offense, burying 3-pointers at 11:44 and 9:34, to push the advantage first to 17 then to 20, 29-9. After Foster answered over a minute later with a triple with 8:14 left to give the Tigers double-digit points, Jones fed Rowe for a layup to keep it a 19-point difference as the clock passed the eight-minute mark.

Tennessee State clawed back to within 15 twice during the next three-and-a-half minutes but Jones kept MT on top by 18, 38-20, with 4:24 remaining. An Alana Morris jumper and two free throws from Foster trimmed the deficit to 14 two minutes later before Rowe put-in a layup with 2:15 to go for a 40-24 lead.

After the Tigers sliced the margin to 14, the closest in over 10 minutes, Jones ignited a half-closing 7-2 run to send Middle Tennessee into the locker room on top, 47-28.

Avery Jones scored the first bucket of the half for TSU, but then Elie tallied six-straight points before Cason located Kortni Jones on a fast-break layup in an 8-0 surge to increase the margin to 25, 55-30, with 16:30 remaining. Within another two minutes, the difference grew to 29, 62-33, on a Kortni Jones triple.

However, the Tigers sliced the margin to 22 behind a 7-0 run before the Blue Raiders answered with their own 8-0 surge as redshirt sophomore Lauren March went coast-to-coast to give Middle Tennessee a 70-40 advantage with 9:09 to play.

After back-to-back Shuler jumpers pulled Tennessee State within 26, 70-44, a 14-0 MT streak made the margin 40, 84-44, for the first time with 5:27 left. The Tigers would get no closer than 38 the remainder of the game, as the difference topped out at 41 two times, the last on a free throw from junior Dymon Raynor to decide the final score.

The Blue Raiders dominated the scoring in the paint by a 50-to-22 edge, while also outscoring TSU 24-to-4 on second-chance points and 36-to-15 on points off turnovers, after creating 27 Tiger miscues.

Middle Tennessee will return to action at 7 p.m. Wednesday when it plays host to FIU in the Sun Belt opener. The Panthers have already played one conference game, dropping a decision at Western Kentucky Dec. 11, and own a 7-4 overall record entering the contest.

Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey will have all the action on the Blue Raider Network of WMOT (89.5 FM) and WGNS (1450 AM, 100.5 FM, 101.9 FM).

In addition, 2012 Sun Belt Conference Tournament booklets are now on sale at the Middle Tennessee athletic ticket office. Cost per booklet is \$83 and includes a ticket to all eight sessions of the Sun Belt Championships, March 3-6, in Hot Springs, Ark.

Fans can purchase booklets by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU or visiting [goblueraiders.com](http://goblueraiders.com).

**Middle Tennessee postgame quotes:**

**HEAD COACH RICK INSELL:**

Our big thing was that we were more consistent today than we have been. Tennessee State is not a bad team; they are going to compete in the OVC with everybody. They beat South Alabama the other day at their place. South Alabama let them hang around and hang around, and the next thing you know, they were up 10. They hit some shots, knocked down some free throws and did the things you have to do to win, so we were very concerned about Tennessee State coming in here today. We didn't want to let them come in here and knock down some threes and put us in a big game.

Defensively early, we turned it up a little bit. We knocked down some shots, Kortni hit 5-of-12 threes and we can live with that. Shanice Cason hit two big threes for us. She was 6-of-13.

*On Laken Leonard sitting out the rest of the half*

She wouldn't shoot the ball. She had two shots that I know that she passed up, and there may have been three or four. Laken is a good shooter and she's got a lot of basketball IQ, but sometimes she doesn't want to shoot the basketball. I don't know what it is, but she has got to shoot the ball and that's why I didn't play her the rest of the half.

**EBONY ROWE:**

This game was so important because I feel like the games that we lost, we lost because we couldn't put together a good 40 minutes, in practice or in a game. I thought this was one of the first games that we have started off strong in both halves and that made me feel good.

It will be a tough game but all of our games are a tough competition. Them beating South Alabama gave us a different outlook on them. We just have to come in prepared for FIU this week.

*On playing conference games*

We take a lot of pride as a program, even before we got here, of taking care of business here. Especially at home. I think Coach said that we had only lost one conference game at home. So we take a lot of pride in it, and we just want to show the conference early that we are going to dominate and continue to dominate all the way thru the tournament.

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