Blue Raiders open Sun Belt play against FIU Thursday

MT looks to extend three-game winning streak

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Blue Raider men's basketball team looks to carry its success from non-conference play into Sun Belt action as Middle Tennessee hosts FIU in the league opener on Thursday. The two teams will square off at 7 p.m. CT in Murphy Center. **GAME INFORMATION**
Date: Thursday, Dec. 29
Time: 7 p.m. CT
Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Facility: Murphy Center

MEDIA INFORMATION
Radio: WGNS (1450 AM, 101.9 FM, 100.5 FM)/WNSR (560 AM)/WMOT (89.5 FM)
Play-by-Play: Chip Walters
Analysis: Kyle Turnham
Live Video/Audio/Stats: Available here

SERIES INFORMATION
Overall: MT leads, 19-6
In Murfreesboro: MT leads, 9-3
Under coach Davis: MT leads, 16-3
First meeting: MT 86, FIU 72 (1/7/91 in Murfreesboro)
Last meeting: MT 73, FIU 38 (3/6/11 in Hot Springs, Ark.)
Last year: MT 80, FIU 68 (2/12/11 in Murfreesboro) // MT 79, FIU 70 (1/29/11 in Miami)
Current Streak: MT, 4 games
Longest MT streak: 10 games (2002-06)// Longest FIU streak: 3 games (2001-02)

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS
FIU (3-9) has lost three in a row entering Thursday's Sun Belt contest, including a 61-53 loss to Bowling Green in the Panthers' last outing on Dec. 22. DeJuan Wright leads the Panthers in scoring

(15.9 ppg) and rebounding (6.7 rpg) but has missed the last two contests with a knee injury. Phil Taylor (13.2 ppg) and Jeremy Allen (12.6 ppg) are also averaging double-figures.

ALL ABOUT MT (11-2)

Sun Belt Openers

MT is 6-3 in Sun Belt openers under Kermit Davis and 6-5 overall. The Blue Raiders have met the Panthers once in the league opener, with MT earning a 72-63 win on Dec. 18, 2007, in Murfreesboro. **Cracking 300**

MT head coach Kermit Davis earned his 300th career victory in the Blue Raiders' 65-62 win over Belmont on Dec. 13. Davis, in his 10th season at the helm of the Blue Raiders, holds a 235-178 record as a Division I head coach and was 66-25 as a junior college head coach.

Quadruple Threat

It's no surprise MT's offense is not only one of the best in the Sun Belt, but also in the nation. Four of the top six shooters in the league are Blue Raiders. Shawn Jones (.584) ranks second, JT Sulton (.560) is third, Marcos Knight (.558) is fourth and LaRon Dendy (.529) is sixth. That kind of shooting has helped MT to shoot 50 percent or better in eight contests, including four performances of better than 60 percent.

It's Not Just Offense

While the Blue Raider offense has been hot, the defense is no slouch either. MT leads the Sun Belt in field goal percentage defense (.392) and 3-point defense (.308), holding each of its opponents under 50 percent shooting thus far. In fact, eight of 13 opponents have shot 40 percent or worse against the Blue Raiders, with Akron's 28.6 percentage marking a season-low for MT opponents.

Double-Double Duo

LaRon Dendy and JT Sulton each posted double-doubles against Akron on Dec. 4. Dendy collected 19 points and 11 rebounds, while Sulton had 16 points and 11 boards. It marked the fourth double-double of Sulton's career and the second for both Dendy and Sulton this year. It also marked the first time two Blue Raiders had a double-double in the same game since Michael Cuffee (24 pts, 10 rebs) and Marcus Morrisson (10 pts, 11 rebs) did it against Arkansas State on Jan. 13, 2005. It is the 75th time in program history at least two Blue Raiders have a had a double-double in one game.

Nation Taking Notice

The Blue Raiders have received votes in both the AP and coaches poll this season. MT received two votes for the Nov. 21 edition of the AP poll and earned three votes in the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll on Dec. 26. It marks the first time in program history the Blue Raiders have received votes in either poll. The Blue Raiders also jumped to No. 11 in the current CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25. **Statistically Sound**

MT is currently one of the hottest offensive teams in the nation, leading the country in field goal percentage (.535) according to the NCAA as of Dec. 11. Additionally, the Blue Raiders ranked in the top 45 in five other categories:

Field Goal Percentage: 1st (.535)
3-Point Percentage: 8th (.430)
Scoring Margin: 31st (14.5)
Assists Per Game: 31st (15.9)
Blocks Per Game: 39th (5.3)
Scoring Offense: 42nd (77.8)

Starting It Off Right

The Blue Raiders got off to a 4-0 start this season, marking the first 4-0 start since the 1994-95 season. It also marked the first time in program history MT defeated three Division I opponents to open the season. The 8-1 start for MT was the best since 1980-81 when the Blue Raiders started 12-1. **The 10-Win Mark**

MT won 10 games within the first 12 this year, marking the fastest the program has reached the 10-win plateau since the 1990-91 season. It also marks the first time the Blue Raiders have collected at least 10 non-conference victories since the 2004-05 season when MT had 12 non-conference wins. **Road Warriors**

MT started the season 4-0 on the road, marking the first time since 1967-68 the Blue Raiders won four straight road games to start the season. The last time the Blue Raiders won at least four consecutive road games in a season was 2006-07 when MT reeled off five in a row during Sun Belt play. **Halfway There**

MT is 10-0 when leading at halftime. The Blue Raiders are outscoring opponents 553-430 in the second half compared to a 421-366 advantage in the first half. MT is shooting a blistering 60.6 percent in the second half, including a 51.9 percent clip from beyond the arc, while holding opponents to 38.8 percent in the second stanza. The Blue Raiders are particularly hot in the waning minutes of the contest, shooting 60.7 percent in the final five minutes this season. **Davis One Win Away**

Head coach Kermit Davis is on track to become the winningest coach in MT history. With the 68-56 win over Ole Miss on Dec. 21, Davis tied former coach Jimmy Earle with a program-record 164 all-time coaching victories. This season, Davis joins Earle, who spent a decade guiding the Blue Raiders, as the longest tenured coaches in program history. **Oden in the Clutch**

Senior guard Jimmy Oden was clutch against Tennessee State on Dec. 1. Oden finished with a career-high 14 points, going 11-for-12 from the stripe. In the final two minutes of the contest, Oden hit 10 consecutive free throws to seal the 77-62 victory. **Knight of Honor**

Marcos Knight was named the Sun Belt Player of the Week on Nov. 22. Knight averaged 16.3 points and 7.0 rebounds during a three-game stretch for the Blue Raiders. He became the first Blue Raider to earn the league's weekly honor since Desmond Yates on Jan. 25, 2010 and is the fourth Blue Raider in program history to earn the award. **Shooting the Lights Out**

MT's shooting performance against UCLA on Nov. 15 was one for the ages. The Blue Raiders smashed the school record, shooting a 71.4 percent clip from the field and surpassing the previous mark of 68.9 percent set in 1981. MT has now had four halves of basketball this season shooting 70 percent or better:

11/22 vs Cumberland 2nd half: 75.0%
11/15 vs. UCLA 2nd half: 72.0%
11/15 vs. UCLA 1st half: 70.8%
11/11 vs. Austin Peay: 70.0%

On record, the Blue Raiders had only bettered the 70-percent mark in one half three times in program history prior to this year:

.833 vs. Akron (2/4/82)
.800 vs. Tennessee Tech (1/8/81)
.724 vs. Austin Peay (1/12/87)

Raining Three's

Not only did MT set a record from the field, but the Blue Raiders also hit a Sun Belt record 90.9 percent of their 3-pointers against UCLA. The mark, also a school record, surpassed the previous

league record of 90.0 percent set by UAB in 1986 and is tied for fourth in NCAA history.
(Min. 10 made)
03/06/11 - 93.3%, Ohio State (14-15) vs. Wisconsin
12/03/00 - 91.7%, Drexel (11-12) vs. Delaware
12/11/04 - 91.7%, Northern Arizona (11-12) vs. Willamette
11/15/11 - 90.9%, Middle Tennessee (10-11) at UCLA
02/01/88 - 90.9%, Duke (10-11) vs. Clemson
01/16/93 - 90.9%, Hofstra (10-11) vs. Rhode Island

And One More Thing

MT hit its first nine treys and finished 10-of-11 from beyond the arc against UCLA. The Blue Raiders didn't miss a trey until 1:39 to go in the game. Before the streak ended, MT's 9-for-9 performance matched an NCAA record for highest perfect 3-point field goal percentage in a game, set by Minnesota against Penn State on Jan. 11, 2009. **Keeping Up with the Jones'**

Both Shawn and Jason Jones have played key roles for the Blue Raiders this season. Shawn has had four double-figure games, including a season-high 13 points on a 6-of-6 performance against Austin Peay on Nov. 26. Jones ranks second on the team with 18 blocks. After missing the first four games, Jason produced three double-figure games in six appearances, including three starts. He also has chipped in 10 assists and four steals. **Playing Extra**

MT and Belmont played into double overtime on Nov. 20, marking the first overtime game of the season for the Blue Raiders. Last season, MT played four overtime games, including one double-overtime contest, ironically, a loss to Belmont on Dec. 7, 2010. The two contests against Belmont are the only double-overtime games for the Blue Raiders since a triple overtime loss to New Mexico State in 2002. **Spreading the Wealth**

MT's 10-of-11 3-point performance against UCLA was far from a one-man show. In fact, it was a six-man show. Six different Blue Raiders hit a triple, led by Raymond Cintron and Bruce Massey, who each went 3-for-3. In addition, five Blue Raiders scored double-figures. Altogether, 10 Blue Raiders have had at least one double-digit performance this year and nine of them have had multiple double-figure games. **Closing It Out**

MT has consistently closed out its opponents early in 10 of its 11 victories. Below is the span of time for each game in which MT took the lead and never relinquished it.
11/11 vs. Austin Peay - 29:30
11/13 at Loyola Marymount - 16:24
11/15 at UCLA - 27:31
11/19 vs. UNCG - 22:15
11/22 vs. Cumberland - 39:12
11/26 at Austin Peay - 40:00
12/1 at Tennessee State - 12:23
12/4 vs. Akron - 33:48
12/10 vs. UT Martin - 31:42
12/21 vs. Ole Miss - 10:57

This means out of the total 400 minutes in those contests, the Blue Raiders went 234:42 without falling behind, which is about 59 percent of the time. **Hammonds Stepping Up**

Sophomore guard Kerry Hammonds reached double-figures for the third time in his career with 11 points against Cumberland, including a 3-for-3 performance from beyond the arc. Hammonds also recorded career-highs in assists (5) and blocks (4). **It's Good to be 80**

With multiple scoring threats, it's no surprise MT has cracked the 80-point mark six times in the first

nine games. The Blue Raiders scored 80 or more only seven times all of last season. **Sulton Reigns**
Junior forward JT Sulton became the first Blue Raider to record a double-double this season, collecting 12 points and 11 rebound at Loyola Marymount. It marked the third double-double of his career, with his last coming against UALR (21 pts, 11 reb) in the 2011 Sun Belt tournament. Sulton has reached double figures in nine out of 13 contests this season. **Dendy is Dandy**
After sitting out last season due to NCAA transfer rules, LaRon Dendy has made an immediate impact for the Blue Raiders. He netted 21 points in the season-opener against Austin Peay and was one rebound shy of a double-double, collecting nine boards. He notched his first double-double of the season at UCLA, collecting 16 points and 13 rebounds, then added his second double-double with 19 points and 11 rebounds against Akron. Twice since the first Austin Peay contest, Dendy has matched his career-high of 21 points (vs. Cumberland and UT Martin). He has also shown versatility on the court, ranking first on the team in scoring (14.5 ppg) and blocks (22) and third on the team with 29 assists. **Tremendous Transfers**
In addition to Dendy, three other transfers have made a considerable impact this season:
Chipola Junior College transfer Marcos Knight has started each contest. Knight is the team's second-leading scorer with 13.2 points per game points and is third with 5.5 rebounds per game. He posted his first career double-double with 17 points and 11 rebounds against Belmont. Knight became the third Blue Raider to post a double-double this season and has reached double-figure scoring in all but two contests.

Bruce Massey dished out a career-high eight assists against Belmont and leads the team with 46 assists this season. In addition, the Dodge City Community College transfer went 3-for-3 from beyond the arc against UCLA, marking his first 3-point attempts of the season, and scored a season-high 14 points. He made it back-to-back games in double-figures with 11 against UNC Greensboro. His 21 steals are second on the team behind Knight's 23.

Mississippi Gulf Coast Junior College transfer Raymond Cintron came off the bench and sank a pair of free throws in his first D-I contest against Austin Peay, then added his first D-I triple against Loyola Marymount. He heated up against UCLA, draining 3-of-3 treys to finish 4-for-4 from the field with 11 points. He followed that performance with a career day against Belmont, going 5-for-9 from 3-point land en route to a career-high 18 points. Cintron added his third double-figure game with 12 points, including 6-of-6 free throw shooting, against UT Martin. He then matched his career-high of 18 points against Ole Miss. **Painting the Town Blue**
In 12 of 13 game this season, the Blue Raiders have dominated their opponent in the paint. Altogether the Blue Raiders own a 432-287 advantage in the paint.
vs. Austin Peay: 38-16 (+22)
at LMU: 24-18 (+6)
at UCLA: 40-28 (+12)
vs. UNCG: 28-18 (+10)
vs. Belmont: 34-42 (-8)
vs. Cumberland: 42-8 (+34)
at Austin Peay: 34-23 (+11)
at Tennessee State: 28-24 (+4)
vs. Akron: 32-22 (+10)
at UAB: 30-26 (+4)
vs. UT Martin: 36-22 (+14)
vs. Ole Miss: 32-22 (+10)

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