First Sun Belt road test on tap for Blue Raiders

MT will face Troy Thursday at 7:30 p.m. CT

January 4, 2012 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Blue Raider men's basketball team takes its five-game winning streak on the road for the first time in Sun Belt action, traveling to Troy for a Thursday showdown against the Trojans. The two teams will square off at approximately 7:30 p.m. CT following the women's contest.

GAME INFORMATION
Date: Thursday, Jan. 5
Time: 7:30 p.m. CT
Location: Troy, Ala.
Facility: Sartain Hall

MEDIA INFORMATION
Radio: WGNS (1450 AM, 101.9 FM, 100.5 FM)/WNSR (560 AM)/WMOT (89.5 FM)
Play-by-Play: Chip Walters

Live Audio: Available here
Live Video: Available here
Live Stats: Available here

SERIES INFORMATION
Overall: MT leads, 8-7
As Sun Belt foes: Troy leads, 7-6
In Troy: Troy leads, 5-2
Under coach Davis: Troy leads, 7-6
First meeting: MT 77, Troy 58 (12/5/70 in Murfreesboro)
First Sun Belt meeting: Troy 70, MT 57 (1/21/06 in Troy)
Last year: Troy 69, MT 65 (OT) (2/17/11 in Troy) // MT 63, Troy 51 (1/20/11 in Murfreesboro)
Current Streak: Troy, 1 game
Longest MT streak: 5 games (2/28/07 - 12/11/08)// Longest Troy streak: 3 games (2x, last 2/12/09 - 2/18/10)
Noteworthy: The home team has won the last three games in the series and six of the last seven regular-season meetings.

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

Troy (5-8, 0-2 SBC) enters Thursday's contest having dropped its last three decisions, including back-to-back road losses at Denver and North Texas to open Sun Belt play. The Trojans fell at Denver, 79-62, on Thursday before suffering an 87-65 defeat to the Mean Green on Saturday. The Trojans have made a name for themselves from beyond the arc this season and currently rank second in the nation with an average of 10.2 treys per game, behind only Florida (11.0). Will Weathers leads the Trojans in points per game at 13.1 and ranks 20th nationally with 6.2 assists per game, while Ray Chambers is the team's top rebounder at 5.9 boards per game.

ALL ABOUT MT (13-2, 2-0 SBC)

Davis becomes all-time winningest coach

Head coach Kermit Davis became Middle Tennessee's all-time winningest coach in the Blue Raiders' 71-66 win over FIU on Dec. 29. It marked Davis' 165th victory at the helm of the Blue Raiders, surpassing former coach Jimmy Earle, who held the record with 164 wins. This season, Davis joins Earle, who spent a decade guiding the Blue Raiders, as the longest tenured coaches in program history.

Nation Taking Notice

The Blue Raiders have received votes in both the AP and Coaches poll this season. In the latest ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll released on Jan. 2, MT received nine votes, putting the Blue Raiders in a tie with New Mexico for 29th nationally. MT also received two votes for the Nov. 21 edition of the AP poll and earned three votes in the 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 moved up to No. 10 in the current CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25. In addition, MT currently sits 42nd in the Sagarin ratings, the highest rating of any Sun Belt team.

Unselfish Play

MT has been one of the top assisting teams in the country this season, currently ranking 33rd nationally with 15.7 assists per game. The Blue Raiders have 236 assists on 396 field goals and, with 15 games remaining, are on pace to collect the most assists of any team during head coach Kermit Davis' tenure. The 2006-07 squad had 401 assists, the most in the last 10 seasons.

Home Sweet Home

MT currently owns a six-game winning streak at Murphy Center. The streak matches the third-best single-season mark under head coach Kermit Davis, as the Blue Raiders also won six in a row at home last year. One more home victory would tie the longest home winning streak in a season during Davis' 10-year career. MT has twice won seven consecutive home games in a season:
Nov. 19, 2004 - Jan. 15, 2005
Nov. 24, 2003 - Jan. 10, 2004

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 237-178 record as a Division I head coach and was 66-25 as a junior college head coach.

Statistically Sound

MT is currently one of the hottest offensive teams in the nation, ranking third in the country in field goal percentage (.512) according to the NCAA as of Jan. 2. Additionally, the Blue Raiders rank in the

top 50 in five other categories:
Field Goal Percentage: 3rd (.512)
Win-Loss Percentage: 15th (.867)
Blocks Per Game: 28th (5.4)
Assists Per Game: 33rd (15.7)
Scoring Margin: 38th (13.1)
3-Point Percentage: 40th (.386)

MT also tops the Sun Belt in five categories (scoring, scoring margin, field goal percentage, field goal percentage defense and blocks) and ranks second in four more (scoring defense, 3-point field goal percentage, 3-point field goal percentage defense and assists).

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 (.567) ranks second, Marcos Knight (.552) is third, JT Sulton (.538) is fourth and LaRon Dendy (.531) 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 is second in 3-point defense (.313), holding 14 of its 15 opponents under 50 percent shooting thus far. In fact, nine of 15 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.
Speaking of Double-Doubles
Dendy added his third and fourth double-doubles of the season in back-to-back games to open Sun Belt play. Dendy had 11 points and 10 rebounds against FIU on Dec. 29, then followed that up with 21 points, matching his career-high, and 11 boards against South Alabama on Dec. 31. It makred the first time a Blue Raider had back-to-back double-doubles since Steve Thomas accomplished the feat in 2005. Dendy has now had five consecutive double-digit scoring performances, including three games of 20 more points. Altogether, he has 11 double-figure games this year and five games of 20 points or more. **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, and MT is now 13-2 for the first time since 1986-87 when the Blue Raiders started 14-2. Additionally, MT's 13 wins before the new year are the most in school history, topping the previous mark of nine in 1991. **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 12-0 when leading at halftime. The Blue Raiders are outscoring opponents 608-495 in the second half compared to a 505-419 advantage in the first half. MT is shooting 57.1 percent in the second half, including a 47.3 percent clip from beyond the arc, while holding opponents to 39.2 percent in the second stanza. **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 five double-figure games, including a 15-point performance, matching his career-high, against FIU on Dec. 29. Jones ranks second on the team with 20 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 12 of 13 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
12/29 vs. FIU - 34:11
12/31 vs. South Alabama - 38:51

This means out of the total 480 minutes in those contests, the Blue Raiders went 307:44 without falling behind, which is about 64 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 has developed into one of MT's most consistent players. He has started 26 consecutive games, the longest streak of any current Blue Raider. Sulton hasn't missed a start since Jan. 29, 2011. He became the first Blue Raider to record a double-double this season, collecting 12 points and 11 rebounds 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 10 out of 15 contests this season and in those 26 consecutive starts, he has produced a total of 17 double-figure scoring performances. **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. Three times since the first Austin Peay contest, Dendy has matched his career-high of 21 points (vs. Cumberland, UT Martin and South Alabama). In the Sun Belt opener against FIU, Dendy posted his third double-double of the season with 11 points and 10 rebounds, then added his fourth with 21 points and 11 rebounds against South Alabama (12/31). He has also shown versatility on the court, ranking first on the team in scoring (14.7 ppg) and blocks (26) and third on the team with 33 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 13.3 points per game points and is third with 5.6 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 52 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 25 steals are second on the team behind Knight's 27.

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 and made it back-to-back double-figure performances with 12 points against FIU on Dec. 29. **Painting the Town Blue**

In 14 of 15 games this season, including 10 in a row, the Blue Raiders have dominated their opponent in the paint. Altogether the Blue Raiders own a 482-329 advantage in the paint and have outscored their opponents by an average of 10.2 points per game in the paint. The widest margin came against Cumberland when MT owned a 42-8 advantage in the paint (+34). It also marked a season-high of points in the paint for the Blue Raiders. The only contest where MT did not outscore its opponents in the paint was against Belmont on Nov. 20 when the Bruins held a 42-34 advantage.

Sun Belt Championship Information

Booklets for the 2012 Sun Belt Men's Basketball Conference Championship are now on sale. Cost is $83 and includes a ticket to all eight sessions for the tournament in Hot Springs, Ark., March 3-6. Fans can purchase tickets by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU or visiting GoBlueRaiders.com.

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