First road trip in a month for Blue Raider women

MT opens 2012 with East Division battle

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team will play in its first road game in nearly a month when it travels to Troy, Ala., to face Sun Belt East Division foe Troy at 5:15 p.m. Thursday. The Blue Raiders played seven out of eight December games inside the historic Murphy Center, only stepping out for a Dec. 9 contest at Xavier in Cincinnati. Middle Tennessee has won its last four entering the first game of the 2012 calendar year, improving its record to 10-5 overall and 2-0 in the Sun Belt. The Blue Raiders sit atop the East Division standings, sharing a perfect conference mark with Florida Atlantic, while North Texas and ULM are also 2-0 in the West Division entering Wednesday's action. Leading the charge for MT is sophomore Ebony Rowe, the reigning Sun Belt Player of the Week. The Preseason Sun Belt co-Player of the Year averaged a double-double of 16.0 points and 12.0 rebounds in the three most recent games to claim her second league weekly honor this season and sixth of her career. Juniors Kortni Jones (14.9 ppg) and Icelyn Elie (12.5) give Middle Tennessee a trio of players averaging double-figure points, while Elie ranks second behind Rowe with 7.5 rebounds per game. The threesome has been the only players to lead the Blue Raiders in scoring in each of the 15 games played up to this point. Thursday's contest also marks the first road conference game this season for Middle Tennessee, as it opened league play with home tilts against FIU and South Alabama. Troy brings a 1-12 overall and

0-2 SBC mark into the meeting for 10th-year head coach Michael Murphy. The Trojans' only victory thus far came on the road Dec. 15, as they picked up a 69-59 win at Alabama State. DeAngela Swoard is the lone Troy player in double-figure scoring, recording 13.3 ppg, while Tenia Manuel tops the squad with 6.7 rebounds per game. The Blue Raiders lead the all-time series 14-0, including a 12-0 mark in head coach Rick Insell's six seasons. Highlighting the series was a 50-point performance by All-American Alysha Clark in the meeting in Troy three years ago. She set the school record and tied the Sun Belt mark for single-game points, lifting MT to a 75-60 victory inside Sartain Hall. Dick Palmer will call 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.

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