

# Battle between Sun Belt division leaders set as Blue Raiders host Louisiana

## Saturday's tipoff slated for 5:30 p.m. CT

January 6, 2012 · Athletic Communications

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.** - It will be a battle of the Sun Belt's division leaders when the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team welcomes Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns to Murphy Center Saturday. The Blue Raiders, sitting atop the East Division at 3-0, will put their six-game winning streak on the line against the Cajuns, who are tied with UALR for the West Division lead at 2-0. Tipoff is slated for 5:30 p.m. CT, following the women's contest which begins at 3:00 p.m. CT. **GAME INFORMATION**

Date: Saturday, Jan. 7  
Time: 5:30 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, 9-6 // As Sun Belt foes: MT leads, 7-6  
In Murfreesboro: MT leads, 6-1  
Under coach Davis: MT leads, 6-5  
First meeting: MT 85, UL 79 (1/23/59 in Lafayette)  
First Sun Belt meeting: UL 85, MT 57 (2/17/01 in Lafayette)



Last year: MT 73, UL 64 (OT) (1/8/11 in Lafayette)

Current Streak: MT, 6 games

Longest MT streak: 6 games (1/28/06-present) // Longest UL streak: 5 games (1/25/03-3/6/05)

Noteworthy: MT has not lost to UL since March 6, 2005, when the Blue Raiders suffered a 71-57 defeat in the second round of the Sun Belt Championship. The Blue Raiders have won four in a row over the Ragin' Cajuns in Murfreesboro. **SCOUTING THE RAGIN' CAJUNS**

Louisiana (8-8, 2-0 SBC) has reeled off three straight wins, including victories in its last two Sun Belt contests. The Ragin' Cajuns earned a 72-70 overtime win at WKU on Thursday after opening league action with a 67-55 victory over Florida Atlantic on Dec. 31. The duo of J.J. Thomas and Kadeem Coleby are averaging double-figures to lead the Cajuns at 11.4 and 10.3 points per game, respectively. Overall, Louisiana's field goal percentage defense (.396) ranks second in the league just behind MT, while the Cajuns are third in scoring offense (70.2 ppg) and field goal percentage (.454).

### **ALL ABOUT MT (14-2, 3-0 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 ColleagueInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25. In addition, MT currently sits 38th in the Sagarin ratings, the highest rating of any Sun Belt team.

#### **Streaking Raiders**

The Blue Raiders are currently riding a six-game winning streak, the longest since the 2008-09 season when MT won seven straight. A win against Louisiana on Saturday would match the 2008-09 streak for the longest winning streak of Davis' tenure. **Unselfish Play**

MT has been one of the top assisting teams in the country this season, currently ranking 37th nationally with 15.4 assists per game. The Blue Raiders have 246 assists on 421 field goals and, with 14 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 238-178 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 (.578) ranks second, JT Sulton (.545) is third, Marcos Knight (.535) is fifth and LaRon Dendy (.510) 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 (.391) and is second in 3-point defense (.314), holding 15 of its 16 opponents under 50 percent shooting thus far. In fact, 10 of 16 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 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 marked the first time a Blue Raider had back-to-back double-doubles since Steve Thomas accomplished the feat in 2005. Altogether, he has 11 double-figure games this year and five games of 20 points or more. **Statistically Sound**

MT is currently one of the hottest offensive teams in the nation, ranking sixth in the country in field goal percentage (.503) according to the NCAA as of Jan. 5. Additionally, the Blue Raiders rank in the top 50 in six other categories:

Field Goal Percentage: 3rd (.512)

Win-Loss Percentage: 10th (87.5)

Blocks Per Game: 34th (5.2)

Scoring Margin: 35th (12.9)

Assists Per Game: 37th (15.4)

3-Point Percentage: 40th (.386)

Field Goal Percentage Defense: 44th (39.1) MT also tops the Sun Belt in four categories (scoring, scoring margin, field goal percentage and field goal percentage defense) and ranks second in five more (scoring defense, 3-point field goal percentage, 3-point field goal percentage defense, assists and blocks).

### **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 14-2 for the first time since 1986-87 when the Blue Raiders also started 14-2. It marks only the third time in program history MT has reached the 14-2 mark, with the 18-2 start in 1974-75 standing as the best start in school history. Additionally, MT's 13 wins before the new year are the most in school history, topping the previous mark of nine in 1991. **And For League Starters** MT has also gotten off to a solid Sun Belt start at 3-0. It marks the second time in the last 19 years the Blue Raiders have started 3-0 or better in league play. MT started 5-0 in 2008-09, the best league start in Davis' tenure. Prior to that, the last time MT started 3-0 or better in league play was the 1991-92 season as a member of the OVC. The Blue Raiders' best league start in history was 9-0 in 1974-75. **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 13-0 when leading at halftime. The Blue Raiders are outscoring opponents 635-521 in the second half compared to a 541-446 advantage in the first half. MT is shooting 55.4 percent in the second half, including a 44.2 percent clip from beyond the arc, while holding opponents to 39.1 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 six 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 13 of 14 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

1/5 at Troy - 35:36

This means out of the total 520 minutes in those contests, the Blue Raiders went 343:20 without falling behind, which is about 66 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 27 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 16 contests this season and in those 27 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 (14.3 ppg) and blocks (27) 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 12.8 points per game points and is third with 5.8 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 55 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 26 steals are second on the team behind Knight's 29.

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 15 of 16 games this season, including 11 in a row, the Blue Raiders have dominated their opponent in the paint. Altogether the Blue Raiders own a 504-349 advantage in the paint and have outscored their opponents by an average of 9.7 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.

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