Middle Tennessee reaches triple digits in blowout win over Louisiana

Blue Raiders grab most team rebounds in Insell era

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Middle Tennessee scored a season-high point total and grabbed the most rebounds in the Rick Insell era in cruising past visiting Louisiana Saturday afternoon, 104-53, inside the historic Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

The Blue Raiders surpassed the 100-point plateau for the first time this season and 13th time under Insell, improving to 13-0 under his watch in such games. Overall, Middle Tennessee raised its record to 37-7 all-time when surpassing the 100-point barrier.

The 50 team rebounds are the most during Insell's tenure, topping the previous high of 48 set three times, most recently at South Alabama Jan. 2, 2011.

The Blue Raiders also equaled the eighth-highest margin of victory in school history of 51 points, tying the 103-52 win against Troy Jan. 19, 2011, and 90-39 triumph over Morris Brown Jan. 29, 2002. The Troy victory was also the last time the 100-point mark was attained.

Five Middle Tennessee (12-5, 4-0 SBC) reached double-figure scoring, also the first time since the Troy contest the Blue Raiders accomplished the feat. Leading the charge offensively was junior Kortni Jones with 23 points, including hitting one-half of her eight field goals from behind the 3-point arc. She added a team-high six assists, two steals and a blocked shot in 33 minutes.

Classmate Icelyn Elie registered her fifth double-double of the season and eighth of her career with 22 points and 12 rebounds, including a perfect 7-of-7 at the foul line.

Sophomore Ebony Rowe, the reigning Sun Belt Player of the Week, notched 18 points and nine rebounds. She converted 9-of-11 field goals and tied her career best with three blocked shots in only 31 minutes.

Also tallying double-digit points were freshman Shanice Cason with 11 to go along with her career-high eight rebounds, and redshirt sophomore Lauren March with a career-best 10 points. Redshirt freshman Stephanie Myers saw the most extensive action of her career, playing the final three minutes to score six points and three rebounds, including a turn-around jumper in the lane to reach the 100-point plateau.

Michelle Brunker paced the Ragin' Cajuns with 14 points, two more than teammate Krystal Motley's dozen. Bianca Davis added 10 points off the bench to give Louisiana (5-10, 0-3 SBC) a trio in double digits.

Josie West, Nicole Morris and Brooklyn Arceneaux each hauled in a team-high four rebounds.

Middle Tennessee dominated points-in-the-paint by a 56-to-22 margin, and points off turnovers by a 31-to-6 edge as it forced 24 Ragin' Cajun miscues.

Neither team was able to pull away early until a pair of free throws and a 3-pointer from Jones pushed the Blue Raider edge to 14-9 with 14:37 left. After a Louisiana turnover, Middle Tennessee kept its ensuing possession alive with four-straight offensive rebounds before sophomore KeKe Stewart finally found the bottom of the net to make it 16-9 with 13:16 remaining.

The difference would dip to four, 20-16, two minutes later following a Brunker triple, but the Blue Raiders responded with an Elie put-back to open a 14-0 run over the next four-and-a-half minutes to widen their lead to 34-16 at the 6:44 mark. All but the final two points of the surge, which came via a pair of Elie charity tosses, were scored inside the paint.

Davis hit a 3-pointer to halt the MT run, but again Middle Tennessee pulled away thanks to a 22-4 streak to close the half, including holding the Ragin' Cajuns scoreless over the final 4:30 to take a 58-23 halftime advantage. The 58 points in the opening half equaled the entire regulation point total for the Blue Raiders in Thursday's win at Troy.

Motley opened the second stanza with a layup nearly 60 seconds into the period and after she made another two buckets just over a minute later to make it 63-29, Middle Tennessee mounted a 14-4 surge to cover nearly four minutes to increase the difference to 44, 77-33, on three-straight Jones jumpers.

Louisiana knocked down the next six points, including a pair of Robbie Brown jumpers, but the lead would swell to 45, 88-43, on a pair of Elie free throws at the 9:09 mark. March grabbed the rebound on her own miss on the next MT possession and stuck back the next shot to reach the 90-point plateau with 8:47 to play.

Brunker drained another trey almost two minutes later, closing her team within 44, 90-46, before eight-straight Blue Raider points, including 3-pointers from Cason and March, gave Middle

Tennessee a game-high, 52-point, 98-46 edge with 5:07 left.

As Insell began to clear his bench, Motley knocked the deficit to 50 before Myers' turnaround jumper from seven feet for the 100-point mark with 2:46 remaining. She added her final buckets at 1:33 and with 26 seconds to play, as Davis connected on the final Ragin' Cajun points on a 3-pointer with 43 seconds left to help decide the final score.

Middle Tennessee finished by shooting 41-of-80 (51.3 percent) from the floor, the second time this season it has made more than one-half of its field goals.

The Blue Raiders return to the road this week with a pair of games in Florida, starting at 4:30 p.m. (CST) Thursday in the second meeting with FIU this year in Miami. Middle Tennessee will then battle Florida Atlantic at 2 p.m. (CST) Saturday in Boca Raton, Fla.

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.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes:

HEAD COACH RICK INSELL:
We really felt bad, the coaches and players, about how we played at Troy, and I felt like we came out and played pretty good today. We didn't do a lot yesterday. We had to fill our tanks back up. I had the girls over at the house last night and grilled some steaks. I could tell by their attitude, they sat around the tables and ate like it was a Thanksgiving dinner. They ate and ate, everything we had in the house. When they left last night, I told my wife that I felt like they had a good time and today they did play well.

On Lauren March having a good game
We need Lauren. Lauren and Laken Leonard had 18 points and six rebounds between them, and I'll take that every night. And then you've got Janay Brinkley coming in and giving Kortni a break, and did some good things today. Those kids there are getting better and our post play with KeKe and Molly and Dymon and Stephanie was good. You saw some of the future out there today with Stephanie. Stephanie is getting better every day. She's not ready right now, but she will be next year.

Do you tell your team that a win like today is what could be every game?
Yes, that is exactly what we tell them. This team (UL) got beat by Western by four points at Bowling Green on Wednesday night, and that just shows how bad we did play at Troy. Don't get me wrong, at Troy we just didn't come out to play, tonight we came out to play.

KORTNI JONES:
We had a real hard game against Troy. We didn't come in as focused as we had hoped, but we wanted to come into today's game focused and get a really good win and send a message to the Sun Belt Conference that we are as focused as we used to be. It was mostly a change in attitude.

We had missed a lot of easy shots at Troy, and we came in on Friday and worked on free throws and tip drills. We missed 17 close shots at Troy; that's 34 points. We worked on that, especially the post players, to make sure we hit our tip shots, so we wouldn't have to worry about it at the end.

LAUREN MARCH:
We knew what we had to do today, and that was come out with a lot of intensity, force some turnovers and play our game. A lot of today's game was because of how we played at Troy. The win at Troy wasn't pleasant, so we knew what we had to do. Coach stressed defense, forcing turnovers and playing with passion tonight. At halftime, Coach told us the score was 0-0, so we came out the second half and decided to play our game and take it to them.

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