Blue Raiders take seven-game winning streak to FIU Thursday

MT remains atop Sun Belt East Division at 4-0

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee men's basketball will put its undefeated Sun Belt record on the line during a two-game road swing through Florida this week. The Blue Raiders, currently sitting atop the league's East Division at 4-0, will look to extend their seven-game winning streak at FIU on Thursday. The two teams will square off at 6:30 p.m. CT at U.S. Century Bank Arena in Miami. **GAME INFORMATION**
Date: Thursday, Jan. 12
Time: 6:30 p.m. CT
Location: Miami
Facility: U.S. Century Bank Arena

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/Stats: Available here

SERIES INFORMATION
Overall: MT leads, 20-6 // As Sun Belt foes: MT leads, 18-6
In Miami: MT leads, 9-3
Under coach Davis: MT leads, 17-3
First meeting: MT 86, FIU 72 (1/7/91 in Murfreesboro)

First Sun Belt meeting: FIU 61, MT 59 (1/11/01 in Murfreesboro)
Last meeting: MT 71, FIU 66 (12/29/11 in Murfreesboro)
Last year: MT 73, FIU 38 (3/6/11 in Hot Springs, Ark.) // MT 80, FIU 68 (2/12/11 in Murfreesboro) // MT 79, FIU 70 (1/29/11 in Miami)
Current Streak: MT, 5 games (Dating back to 2/25/10)
Longest MT streak: 10 games (2002-06)// Longest FIU streak: 3 games (2001-02)
Noteworthy: MT has won five in a row and seven of the last eight against the Panthers. The Blue Raiders have won the last three meetings in Miami and have not lost at FIU since Feb. 9, 2008.

PREVIOUS MEETING

The two teams met in Murfreesboro on Dec. 29 in the Sun Belt opener, with MT earning the 71-66 victory. It was a memorable night for the Blue Raiders, as the win gave head coach Kermit Davis his 165th MT victory, surpassing Jimmy Earle as the program's all-time winningest coach. JT Sulton scored a season-high 17 points and led five Blue Raiders in double figures. Shawn Jones matched his career-high of 15 points and LaRon Dendy posted his third double-double of the season with 11 points and 10 rebounds, in addition to chipping in three blocks. Raymond Cintron scored 12 points and Marcos Knight added 11 points to go along with six assists, six rebounds and three steals. FIU saw a trio of Panthers reach double-digit scoring, paced by Phil Taylor's 22. Jeremy Allen tallied 17 points and Dominique Ferguson added a double-double with 14 points and 11 rebounds. The Blue Raiders matched their season-low with just eight turnovers while capitalizing on 16 FIU turnovers and converting them to 20 points. The Panthers did, however, out-shoot MT, hitting 51 percent of their shots compared to the Blue Raiders' 40 percent. It marked the only time this season an MT opponent shot better than 50 percent. The free throw line also proved to be a critical part of the game, as MT was 27-of-42, a season-high for attempts, while FIU finished just 10-of-23.

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

FIU (4-11, 1-2 SBC) has dropped five of its last six decisions, including a 54-50 loss to ULM on Saturday in the Panthers' most recent outing. The lone win during the span came in an 81-63 victory at WKU on Dec. 31. The Panthers have been without leading-scorer DeJuan Wright for the past five games. Wright was averaging 15.9 points and 6.7 rebounds per game before suffering a knee injury. FIU has two other double-digit scoring threats in Phil Taylor (14.6 ppg) and Jeremy Allen (13.3 ppg). Dominique Ferguson currently tops the Panthers with 6.8 rebounds per game and is averaging 9.0 points per game.

ALL ABOUT MT (15-2, 4-0 SBC)

11 of 12

MT has won 11 of its last 12 contests. It marks the best 12-game stretch since 1997-98 when the Blue Raiders also won 11 of 12 from Dec. 18, 1997, through Jan. 24, 1998, before suffering a 78-75 loss at Murray State. The only loss during the 12-game span was an 85-74 defeat at Eastern Illinois in the sixth game of the stretch.

Offense vs. Defense

The Blue Raider offense got off to a hot start during non-conference play, but its the defense that has dominated in MT's four Sun Belt victories. In non-conference action, the Blue Raiders averaged 76.1 points per game, held opponents to 62.6 points per game, and shot 52.6 percent from the field, including a 41.2 percent from beyond the arc. Compare that to MT's 66.8 points per game, 40.6 percent shooting and 21.7 percent 3-point shooting in conference play. Despite cooling off offensively in league games, the Blue Raiders are holding opponents to 56.0 points per game and

have outscored their league foes by an average of 10.8 points per game. In fact, the last three foes have scored 53 points or less and have lost by a combined 38 points. MT also is averaging 3.1 fewer turnovers while forcing opponents into an extra turnover per league contest.

Ray Shining in the Sun Belt

Junior guard Raymond Cintron has taken a liking to Sun Belt play already. After averaging just 6.6 points per game in non-conference play, the JUCO transfer is the team's second-leading scorer in league action with 12.8 points per game. He has scored double-figures in each of the four conference contests and in five straight games. Cintron is also 19-of-20 from the free throw line in league games and 34-of-36 this season.

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. 9, MT received 20 votes, more than doubling the previous week's nine votes and putting the Blue Raiders at 31st nationally. It marks the third straight week MT has received votes in the Coaches poll. MT also received two votes for the Nov. 21 edition of the AP poll. 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. 7 in the current CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25. In addition, MT currently sits 43rd in the Sagarin ratings, the highest rating of any Sun Belt team.

Streaking Raiders

The Blue Raiders are currently riding a seven-game winning streak, matching the longest streak since the 2008-09 season and the longest of Davis' tenure. An eight-game streak would be the longest since MT won a school-record 14 straight during the 1985-86 season.

Unselfish Play

MT has been one of the top assisting teams in Sun Belt this season, currently ranking second in the league with 14.9 assists per game. The Blue Raiders have 253 assists on 439 field goals and, with 13 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 seven-game winning streak at Murphy Center. The streak matches the best single-season mark under head coach Kermit Davis. In addition to this season, MT has twice won seven consecutive home games in a season during Davis' 10 years:

Nov. 19, 2004 - Jan. 15, 2005

Nov. 24, 2003 - Jan. 10, 2004

One more home victory would not only give MT the longest single-season home winning streak under Davis, but it would match the longest home winning streak since the Blue Raiders won 10 in a row at Murphy Center spanning the 2003-04 and 2004-05 seasons.

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 11th in the country in field goal percentage (.495) according to the NCAA as of Jan. 9. Additionally, the Blue Raiders rank in the top 50 in five other categories:
Win-Loss Percentage: 9th (88.2)
Field Goal Percentage: 11th (49.5)
Scoring Margin: 28th (12.8)
Field Goal Percentage Defense: 30th (38.6)
Blocks Per Game: 34th (5.2)
Scoring Defense: 50th (61.1)

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

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 seven shooters in the league are Blue Raiders. Shawn Jones (.559) ranks second, JT Sulton (.546) is third, Marcos Knight (.519) is fifth and LaRon Dendy (.503) is seventh. 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 (.386) and 3-point defense (.311), holding 16 of its 17 opponents under 50 percent shooting. In fact, 11 of 17 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 makred the first time a Blue Raider had back-to-back double-doubles since Steve Thomas accomplished the feat in 2005. Altogether, he has 12 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 15-2 for the first time since 1974-75 when the Blue Raiders started a program-best 18-2. 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 4-0. It marks the second time in the last 22 years the Blue Raiders have started 4-0 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 4-0 or better in league play was the 1988-89 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 14-0 when leading at halftime. The Blue Raiders are outscoring opponents 675-552 in the second half compared to a 566-468 advantage in the first half. MT is shooting 54.7 percent in the second half, including a 42.3 percent clip from beyond the arc, while holding opponents to 38.5 percent in the second stanza. MT also hasn't trailed in the second half of four straight games. **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 239-178 record as a Division I head coach and was 66-25 as a junior college head coach. **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. **Painting the Town Blue**

In 16 of 17 games this season, including 12 in a row, the Blue Raiders have dominated their opponent in the paint. Altogether the Blue Raiders own a 534-371 advantage in the paint and have outscored their opponents by an average of 9.6 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 opponent in the paint was against Belmont on Nov. 20 when the Bruins held a 42-34 advantage. **Sulton Reigns**

Junior forward JT Sulton has developed into one of MT's most consistent players. He has started 28 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 11 contests this season and in those 28 consecutive starts, he has

produced a total of 18 double-figure scoring performances. **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 21 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. **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. **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 (14.2 ppg) and blocks (29) and third on the team with 34 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 13.0 points per game points and is second with 6.0 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 three contests.

Bruce Massey dished out a career-high eight assists against Belmont and leads the team with 57 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 27 steals are second on the team behind Knight's 31.

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. **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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