Blue Raiders seek 10th-straight win Thursday against Arkansas State

MT one win shy of matching best start in history

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Blue Raider men's basketball team looks to extend its nine-game winning streak when it returns home to host Arkansas State on Thursday. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT at Murphy Center and the game will air on ESPN3 with Chip Walters and Kyle Turnham on the call. **GAME INFORMATION**
Date: Thursday, Jan. 19
Time: 7:00 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: Available here
Live Audio/Stats: Available here

SERIES INFORMATION
Overall: MT leads, 14-11// As Sun Belt foes: MT leads, 12-6
In Murfreesboro: MT leads, 7-4
Under coach Davis: MT leads, 10-4
First meeting: ASU 48, MT 33 (1947-48)
First Sun Belt meeting: ASU 73, MT 61 (1/14/01 in Murfreesboro)
Last year: ASU 69, MT 65 (1/15/11 in Jonesboro)
Current Streak: ASU, 1 game
Longest MT streak: 7 games (1/9/03-1/12/06)// Longest ASU streak: 5 games (12/21/89-2/10/01)
Noteworthy: Prior to last year's loss, MT had won four straight over the Red Wolves. The two teams

have only met once in Murfreesboro since the 2007-08 season and the Blue Raiders won that meeting, 60-57, on Jan. 22, 2009. The last time ASU won in Murfreesboro was Feb. 17, 2007, in a 54-51 decision. MT has won six of the last seven meetings in Murfreesboro.

BLUE RAIDER FASTBREAK POINTS

--With MT's 71-66 win over FIU on Dec. 29, head coach Kermit Davis surpassed Jimmy Earle as MT's all-time winningest coach. It marked Davis' 165th MT victory, eclipsing Earle's mark of 164.
--MT's 17-2 mark is the best since the Blue Raiders started a program-best 18-2 in the 1974-75 season.
--MT is 6-0 to start league play for just the first time in 25 years. The last time the Blue Raiders started 6-0 in league play was the 1986-87 season as a member of the OVC.
--MT's nine-game winning streak is currently tied for sixth-longest in the nation with Kentucky and Oral Roberts, ranking behind Syracuse (19), Murray State (18), Baylor (17), New Mexico (13) and Nevada (11).
--As of the NCAA statistics on Jan. 15, MT ranks 13th in the nation with a 49.3 field goal percentage. The Blue Raiders ranked in the top three for six consecutive weeks to open the season.
--MT is one of only six teams in the nation to crack the 17-win mark already this season, tied for the third-most victories in the nation currently.
--MT's seven road wins this season are tied for the second-most in the country. The Blue Raiders also lead the Sun Belt with 43 league road victories in the past 10 years.
--MT set a school-record with a 71.4 shooting percentage at UCLA on Nov. 15. The Blue Raiders shot 70.8 percent in the first half and 72 percent in the second half of the contest.
--MT's 90.9 3-point shooting percentage (10-for-11) at UCLA tied the fourth-best performance in NCAA history (min. 10 made). It also set Sun Belt and school records.

SCOUTING THE RED WOLVES

Arkansas State (8-11, 2-3 SBC) will play just its second league road contest of the season when the Red Wolves come to Murphy Center Thursday. ASU has played the last four in a row at home and is coming off a 63-62 loss to UALR on Saturday. The Red Wolves bring a balanced offensive attack with five palyers averaging at least 9.5 points per game, led by a pair of players averaging double-figures in Marcus Hooten (12.2 ppg) and Malcoln Kirkland (11.7 ppg). Ed Townsel (9.9 ppg), Trey Finn (9.9 ppg) and Brandon Peterson (9.5 ppg) are also near double-digit scoring. Peterson is the team's top rebounder at 7.4 boards per game, with Kirkland second on the squad at 6.6.

ALL ABOUT MT (17-2, 6-0 SBC)

Among the Nation's Elite

MT is one of only six schools in the country to have reached the 17-win plateau this season, and the 17 victories are currently tied for the third-most wins in the nation behind Syracuse with 19 and Murray State with 18. Kentucky, Baylor and St. Mary's also have 17 victories.

13 of 14

MT has won 13 of its last 14 contests. It marks the best 14-game stretch since 1985-86 season when the Blue Raiders won 14 in a row from Dec. 14, 1985, through Feb. 3, 1986. The 14-game streak, longest in MT history, came to an end at Akron in a 72-70 loss on Feb. 8, 1986.

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. 16, MT received 21 votes, putting the Blue

Raiders at 30th nationally. It marks the fourth 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. 5 in the current CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25. In addition, MT currently sits 36th in the Sagarin ratings, the highest rating of any Sun Belt team.

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. MT is now 17-2 and one win shy of matching the program's best start in history at 18-2 in 1974-75. 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 6-0. The last time MT started 6-0 in league play was the 1986-87 season as a member of the Ohio Valley Conference. It is only the fourth time in program history the Blue Raiders have started 6-0 or better. The Blue Raiders' best league start in history was 9-0 in 1974-75 and second-best was 8-0 in the 1985-86 season. **Gender Wars**

Both the Blue Raider men's and women's basketball programs are off to 6-0 starts in the Sun Belt. It marks the second time in the last four years both teams have started league play 5-0 or better (2008-09). WKU is the only other Sun Belt school to have both programs start at least 5-0, which occurred in 1992-93. No current Sun Belt program has had both teams earn 6-0 starts.

Streaking Raiders

The Blue Raiders are currently riding a nine-game winning streak, the longest of Davis' tenure. It is the longest since MT won a school-record 14 straight during the 1985-86 season and matches the sixth-longest in school history. The streak is also tied for the nation's sixth-longest current win streak behind Syracuse (19), Murray State (18), Baylor (17), New Mexico (13) and Nevada (11). Kentucky and Oral Roberts also are currently riding nine-game winning streaks.

Road Warriors

MT is currently 7-1 on the road after starting the season 4-0 in away contests, 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. The Blue Raiders' seven road victories this season are tied for second-most nationally and MT is one of just seven teams in the country with at least seven wins on the road. And with three of those road victories coming in league games, MT has collected 43 league road victories in the past 10 years, the most of any Sun Belt school.

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 six 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 67.3 points per game, 42.8 percent shooting and 21.6 percent 3-point shooting in conference play. Despite cooling off offensively in league games, the Blue Raiders are holding opponents to 56.2 points per game, third-best in the conference, and have outscored their league foes by an average of 11.2 points per game. In fact, the last five foes have scored 59 points or less and have lost by a combined 62 points. MT also is averaging 2.0 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 among four Blue Raiders averaging double-figures in league action with 10.0 points per game. He has scored double-figures in four of the six conference contests. 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.

Unselfish Play
MT has been one of the top assisting teams in Sun Belt this season, currently ranking second in the league with 14.5 assists per game. The Blue Raiders have 275 assists on 488 field goals and, with 11 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 241-178 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 13th in the country in field goal percentage (.493) according to the NCAA as of Jan. 15. Additionally, the Blue Raiders rank in the top 50 in five other categories:
Win-Loss Percentage: 6th (89.5)
Field Goal Percentage: 13th (49.3)
Field Goal Percentage Defense: 22nd (38.3)
Scoring Margin: 25th (12.7)
Blocks Per Game: 29th (5.2)
Scoring Defense: 38th (60.6)

MT also tops the Sun Belt in six categories (scoring, scoring scoring defense, scoring margin, field

goal percentage, field goal percentage defense and 3-point percentage defense) and ranks second in two more (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 eight shooters in the league are Blue Raiders. Shawn Jones (.553) ranks second, JT Sulton (.541) is fourth, Marcos Knight (.520) is sixth and LaRon Dendy (.494) is eighth. That kind of shooting has helped MT to shoot 50 percent or better in nine 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 (.383) and second in 3-point defense (.310), holding 18 of its 19 opponents under 50 percent shooting. In fact, 13 of 19 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 13 double-figure games this year and five games of 20 points or more. **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.
Halfway There
MT is 15-0 when leading at halftime. The Blue Raiders are outscoring opponents 758-613 in the second half compared to a 620-520 advantage in the first half. MT is shooting 55.0 percent in the second half, including a 42.7 percent clip from beyond the arc, while holding opponents to 37.6 percent in the second stanza. MT also hasn't trailed in the second half in five of the last six games.
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 17 of 19 games this season, including 13 of the last 14, the Blue Raiders have dominated their opponent in the paint. Altogether the Blue Raiders own a 608-414 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 contests where MT did not outscore its opponent in the paint were against Belmont on Nov. 20 when the Bruins held a 42-34 advantage and at FIU on Jan. 12 when both teams tied with 26 points in the paint. **Sulton Reigns**

Junior forward JT Sulton has developed into one of MT's most consistent players. He has started 30 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 13 contests this season and in those 30 consecutive starts, he has produced a total of 20 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 seven double-figure games, including a 15-point performance, matching his career-high, against FIU on Dec. 29. Jones ranks second on the team with 26 blocks. After missing the first four games, Jason produced three double-figure games in six appearances, including three starts. He also has

chipped in 11 assists and five 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 (13.7 ppg) and blocks (33) and third on the team with 36 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 12.4 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 four contests.

Bruce Massey dished out a career-high eight assists against Belmont and leads the team with 65 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 29 steals are second on the team behind Knight's 32.

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. He has started seven of the last nine contests. **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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