Win streak for Middle Tennessee reaches double digits Saturday

Blue Raiders capture 10th-straight victory

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MOBILE, Ala. – Middle Tennessee women's basketball extended its current win streak to 10 and remained the lone unbeaten in Sun Belt action with a 60-53 triumph at South Alabama Saturday evening inside the Mitchell Center in Mobile, Ala. The Blue Raiders placed three players in double-figure scoring, led by junior Kortni Jones' game-high 20 points. She knocked down four of the team's five 3-pointers. Classmate Icelyn Elie contributed her sixth double-double of the season, and ninth of her career, with 13 points and a game-best 10 rebounds, helping MT win the battle on the glass, 33-32. Sophomore Ebony Rowe rounded out the scorers for Middle Tennessee with 18 points, including a 4-of-6 effort at the foul line. Veronica Cherizol's dozen points off the bench, one more than Mary Nixon's 11, led the Lady Jags. Taylor Ammons hauled in a team-high nine caroms, although she was held scoreless. The Blue Raiders held South Alabama to just 27.3 percent from the field in the second half after it hit 50.0 percent of its attempts during the opening 20 minutes. Middle Tennessee finished the game by connecting on 43.1 percent of its field goals. The Blue Raiders used solid free throw shooting early, knocking down four of their first five attempts, to jump out to a 10-8 lead with 11:21 left. Middle Tennessee had built a 9-4 advantage during the opening four minutes before Shanice Cason added another point on the back-end of her two free throws at the 12:38 mark, but Ronneka Robertson sparked a Lady Jag rally with

a layup 30 seconds later. Robertson's field goal started a 6-0 South Alabama stretch during the next two minutes before Jones put MT back on top, 14-12, with her first 3-pointer. Lauren Walker and Mansa El added a pair of triples for the Lady Jags in just over a two-minute span for an 18-14 edge with 7:50 left. After Jones and Elie forced the half's third tie with 6:23 to play, Camille Reynolds drained South Alabama's third-straight trey at the 5:32 mark. Laken Leonard helped shrink the margin to one when she stole the ball directly under her own hoop and went up for a layup. The two teams traded baskets before Jones gave the Blue Raiders a two-point lead with another 3-pointer at 1:54. Cherizol would then tally her second of three-straight baskets for the Lady Jags. Middle Tennessee (16-5, 8-0 SBC) regained the lead on a Rowe layup on its next possession and expanded the difference to four, 29-25, on a Cason steal and feed ahead to a wide-open Jones for a layup. Cherizol knocked down one last field goal before the half concluded to give the Blue Raiders a two-point halftime cushion. Rowe quickly gave MT a four-point lead early in the second half but five-straight Nixon points plus an El charity toss provided USA with a two-point, 33-31, advantage. The Blue Raiders responded with seven-straight points, including four by Cason, to regain control, 38-33, less than five minutes into the period. The Lady Jags would slice the deficit to two a pair of occasions over the next minute-and-a-half but Jones dropped in another trey to keep it a five-point difference, 43-38, with 13:12 to play. Following a Robertson layup, South Alabama (11-8, 4-3 SBC) grabbed a defensive rebound off the ensuing Middle Tennessee possession. With the ball on their end of the floor, the Lady Jags' bench was whistled for a technical. Jones converted 1-of-2 attempts at the charity stripe, opening a 5-0 spurt, which was capped by a pair of Rowe layups, to give the Blue Raiders a 48-40 edge with 10:50 left. A 7-2 South Alabama run cut the margin to three, 50-47, but Rowe again went to work on the inside and Jones continued to knock down shots from behind the arc to push it to an eight-point difference once again, 55-47, with 6:26 remaining. The Lady Jags, however, did not go away quietly and would use a 6-1 run during the next five minutes to cut the deficit to three, 56-53. A pair of Elie free throws and a jumper from Jones offset six missed opportunities by South Alabama down the stretch, as Middle Tennessee held on for the win. The Blue Raiders return to action when they play host to Troy at 7 p.m. Wednesday inside the historic Murphy Center. It will be the only game of the week for Middle Tennessee, as it is not in action next weekend. Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey 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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