

Perfect! Blue Raiders finish conference season unscathed with Sunday win

Rowe joins 1,000-point club

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. –

Middle Tennessee completed its second unbeaten Sun Belt ledger in five years and just the seventh overall in the last 20 seasons with a 77-62 victory at Western Kentucky Sunday afternoon in the regular-season finale for both teams inside E.A. Diddle Arena in Bowling Green, Ky. The Blue Raiders finished 16-0 against league foes this season, matching the 18-0 unbeaten run by MT's 2006-07 squad which was the last to accomplish the feat. Only the Louisiana Tech teams from 1993-94, 1995-96, 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01 can also claim an unbeaten record during Sun Belt play.

Sophomore Ebony Rowe powered Middle Tennessee (24-5, 16-0 SBC) to the victory with her second-straight double-double, 13th of the season and 29th of her career with 27 points and 10 rebounds. In the process, Rowe joined the school's 1,000-point club as its 26th member and became just the second of the elite group to do so by the end of her sophomore campaign joining Priscilla Robinson. Rowe hit 11-of-14 field goals and added



five free throws to finish just two points shy of her career

high. She also moved within six boards of the 600 plateau and continued her climb on the school's all-time list, currently ranked 19th. Junior Kortni Jones nearly contributed a double-double of her own, ending the contest with 15 points, including three 3-pointers, and nine assists. She continues to rank second nationally in triples, raising her season mark to 104. Junior Icelyn Elie chipped in 13 points and eight caroms to go along with two of the team's three blocked shots. Redshirt sophomore Lauren March dropped in three treys to finish with a career-best 11 points. Freshman Shanice Cason handed out eight assists, combining with Jones for the team total of 17 on 30 made field goals. The Blue Raiders concluded the game by shooting 50.0 percent from the floor, hitting one-half of their attempts in both halves. The Lady Toppers were led by 22 points from Alexis Govan and Chastity Gooch's 12. The pair knocked down 15-of-20 field goals between them, helping to offset WKU's 41.9 percent as a team. Keshia Mosley paced Western Kentucky (8-20, 5-11 SBC) with 10 boards. Cason opened the game's scoring with a 3-pointer just 37 seconds into the contest and the two teams remained close following a pair of Govan free throws and a layup at 14:23 to knot the score at 10 apiece. From there, however, Jones and March hit triples to bookend a Rowe layup in an 8-0 run, sparking Middle Tennessee to an 18-10 advantage with 13:05 left. Following a Govan layup at the other end almost a minute later, the Blue Raiders reeled off a 13-2 spurt during the next six minutes, capped by back-to-back Jones threes, to extend their lead to 31-14 with 7:24 remaining. Two Jasmine Johnson charity tosses pulled the Lady Toppers back within 15, and after a second 15-point lead on a Gooch layup at 6:28, Cason netted six of the next eight MT points to push the margin to 23, 41-18, at the 4:06 mark. Mosley would then hit a pair of buckets to trim the gap to 19, but four-straight Rowe points made it a 23-point difference once again. WKU closed the period with four of its own to make it 45-26 at the intermission. The Lady Topper momentum continued in the early stages of the second half, as they mounted a 10-2 surge in the first three-and-a-half minutes to knock Middle Tennessee's lead down to 11, 47-36, on a Gooch jumper with 16:39 left. The Blue Raiders did not waver and consecutive Elie layups were part of a 6-0 run to push the edge back to 17, 53-36, at the 13:50 mark. The teams traded baskets during the next two-and-a-half minutes before March buried another 3-pointer to give Middle Tennessee a 20-point advantage, 62-42, with 11:02 left. Western Kentucky would make another push in the next four minutes, holding the Blue Raiders to just three points while scoring 13 of its own to trim the margin to 10, 65-55, with 7:15 to play. Middle Tennessee again turned to its primary scoring trio of Jones, Elie and Rowe, as they combined for the next seven points to widen the gap back to 17, 72-55, at the 3:49 mark and essentially dampen any chance of a WKU comeback. The Blue Raider lead reached a high of 18 twice down the stretch but the Lady Toppers would get no closer than 15 on Govan's layup to decide the final outcome. Middle Tennessee, already locked into a Noon March 4 quarterfinal contest at the upcoming Sun Belt Championships, will face the winner of the first-round meeting between ULM and Western Kentucky, the two opponents with whom it closed the regular season. 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 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 4-6, in Hot Springs, Ark. Fans can purchase booklets by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU or visiting goblueraiders.com.