Dendy named Sun Belt Player of the Year, Davis Coach of the Year

Dendy, Knight, Sulton earn all-conference nod

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Coach Davis discusses conference awards

NEW ORLEANS - Middle Tennessee head coach Kermit Davis has been named the Sun Belt Coach of the Year and senior forward LaRon Dendy took home the Sun Belt Player of the Year honor, as announced on Wednesday by the conference office. In addition to Dendy also earning first-team accolades, Marcos Knight was named to the all-conference second team and JT Sulton took home third-team honors. It marks the first time a Blue Raider has earned the Sun Belt's top player award, while Davis earns the league's top coaching honor for the second time in his tenure, having also received the accolade in 2003. Davis and Dendy become the first duo from the same school to take home coach and player of the year honors since Denver's Terry Carroll and Yemi Nicholson did so in 2005. MT's three All-Sun Belt selections are the most since joining the league for the 2000-01 season. The last time at least three Blue Raiders were named to all-conference teams was in 1989 when MT had two on the All-OVC First Team and one on the second team. In his 10th year at the helm of the Blue Raiders, Davis took the program to new heights during the 2011-12 regular-season. This year's squad produced 25 overall wins and 14 league victories, both the most in school history. MT also got off to a record-breaking 20-2 start and 10-0 start in league play. Davis became the program's all-time winningest coach earlier this season, earning his 165th MT victory in a 71-66 win over FIU on Dec. 29 to surpass Jimmy Earle's mark of 164. Since

Davis took the reins for the 2002-03 campaign, he has garnered the second-most league wins among active coaches and has led the Blue Raiders to more conference road victories than any other Sun Belt program. Dendy becomes MT's first conference player of the year since Jerry Beck earned Ohio Valley Conference Player of the Year honors in 1981 and 1982. He is the fourth Blue Raider to earn a league's player of the year award, joining Tim Sisneros (1976) and George Sorrell (1975), in addition to Beck. He is also the fourth Blue Raider to earn All-Sun Belt First Team honors, along with Lee Nosse, Tommy Gunn and Desmond Yates. Dendy has been one of the driving forces behind MT's most successful regular-season in program history. The Lou Henson Award candidate has 22 double-figure scoring performances this year, including nine games of at least 20 points and six double-doubles. He is averaging 14.8 points and 7.0 rebounds per game, leading the team and ranking fourth in the league in both categories, in addition to ranking third in the conference in field goal percentage (54.2). His best game of the season came against WKU on Feb. 9 when he posted career-highs in points (26) and rebounds (14), earning him a second Sun Player of the Week honor. Knight is the third Blue Raider in program history to earn second-team Sun Belt honors, joining Mike Dean and James Washington. The team's second-leading scorer, Knight has tallied 22 double-figure games and is averaging 11.7 points per contest. The versatile guard ranks among the league's top 15 in four different categories, including scoring, field goal percentage, assists and steals. He posted his first career double-double against Belmont on Nov. 20 en route to Sun Belt Player of the Week honors and added his career-high of 19 points in MT's two-point victory at North Texas on Feb. 2. JT Sulton is the Blue Raiders' iron man, having started 41 consecutive games prior to his third-team all-conference accolade. The team's second-leading rebounder, Sulton has also been a model of consistency with 19 double-digit scoring performances, including nine in league action. The Yazoo City, Miss., is among the league's top 20 in five different categories, coming in as the fifth-best shooter in the conference with a 53.6 shooting percentage. He posted a pair of double-doubles this season and tallied a season-high 17 points against FIU in the Sun Belt opener on Dec. 29. He also recorded a career-best four blocks against Belmont on Nov. 20. In addition to Davis, Blue Raider women's head coach Rick Insell also was named the Sun Belt Coach of the Year. It marks just the fourth time in history that head coaches for both the men's and women's basketball programs from the same school have earned top coaching honors in the same year. Davis and Insell become the first duo since the 1999 combination of Louisiana Tech's Keith Richard (men) and Leon Barmore (women) to capture both coach of the year honors. WKU's Clem Haskins (M)/Paul Sanderford (W) in 1986 and UAB's Gene Bartow (M)/Bill Ivey (W) in 1985 also accomplished the feat. The Blue Raiders begin their quest for the Sun Belt tournament title on Sunday, March 4 at 6 p.m. CT in Hot Springs, Ark., at Summit Arena. MT, the tournament's top seed, will face the winner of the matchup between eighth-seeded Florida Atlantic and ninth-seeded Arkansas State. The contest will air on CSS with Joe Davis and Dave Odom on the call.

2012 SUN BELT ALL-CONFERENCE AWARDS AND TEAMS

Player of the Year
LaRon Dendy (Middle Tennessee, Sr., F)

Defensive Player of the Year
Chris Udofia (Denver, So., F)

Freshman of the Year
Tony Mitchell (North Texas, Fr., F)

Joe Gottfried Coach of the Year

Kermit Davis, Middle Tennessee

First Team All-Sun Belt Conference
D'Andre Williams (UALR, Sr., G)
Chris Udofia (Denver, So., F)
LaRon Dendy (Middle Tennessee, Sr., F)
Tony Mitchell (North Texas, Fr., F)
Augustine Rubit (South Alabama, So., F)

Second Team All-Sun Belt Conference
Will Neighbour (UALR, So., F)
Brian Stafford (Denver, Sr., G)
DeJuan Wright (FIU, Sr., G)
Josh Brown (Louisiana-Lafayette, Sr., G)
Marcos Knight (Middle Tennessee, Jr., G)

Third Team All-Sun Belt Conference
Malcoln Kirkland (Arkansas State, Sr., F)
Jeremy Allen (FIU, Sr., G)
Phil Taylor (FIU, So., G)
JT Sulton (Middle Tennessee, Jr., F)
Derrick Gordon (WKU, Fr., G)

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