Blue Raiders welcome Marshall to town for NIT Tuesday

Tipoff slated for 8:15 p.m. CT in Murphy Center

March 13, 2012 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The fourth-seeded Blue Raider men's basketball team begins its National Invitation Tournament run on Tuesday, welcoming the No. 5 seed Marshall Thundering Herd to Murphy Center. Tipoff is slated for 8:15 p.m. CT and the game will air on ESPN3 with Adam Amin and Brooke Weisbrod on the call. **GAME INFORMATION**
2012 National Invitation Tournament Bracket
Date: Tuesday, March 13
Time: 8:15 p.m. CT
Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Facility: Murphy Center

MEDIA INFORMATION
Live Video: ESPN3
Play-by-play: Adam Amin
Analysis: Brooke Weisbrod

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 Audio: Available here
Live Stats: Available here

BLUE RAIDER FASTBREAK POINTS
--LaRon Dendy was named the 2012 Sun Belt Player of the Year and Kermit Davis earned the league's Coach of the Year honor. It is the first time MT has received the Sun Belt's top player award, while the top coaching accolade is the second for Davis.
--Marcos Knight was named second-team all-conference and JT Sulton earned third-team honors. 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 20-2 start was the best in program history, topping the previous mark of 18-2 in the 1974-75 season.
--MT's 10-0 league start was the best in program history. It topped the previous mark of 9-0 set in the 1974-75 season when the Blue Raiders were a member of the OVC.
--MT's 12-game winning streak from Dec. 10 through Jan. 26 was the longest in 26 years and is tied for the third-longest in school history.
--MT has won 18 games by a double-figure margin, including 10 of the last 17 contests.
--As of the NCAA statistics on March 11, MT ranks fourth in the nation in field goal percentage (.496). The Blue Raiders ranked in the top three in field goal percentage for six consecutive weeks to open the season and have remained in the top 20 throughout the year.
--As of March 11, MT is one of only 13 teams in the nation with at least 25 wins and 10 road wins.
--MT's 10 road wins this season are the most in school history and tied for the 11th-most in the country as of March 11. The Blue Raiders also lead the Sun Belt with 46 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.

SERIES INFORMATION

Overall: MT leads, 3-2
At MT: MT leads, 2-0
Under Davis: MU leads, 1-0
First meeting: MT 99, MU 82 (2/25/76 in Huntington)
Last meeting: MU 63, MT 60 (11/17/09 in Huntington)
Last meeting in Murfreesboro: MT 91, MU 80 (12/22/87)
Current Streak: MU, 1 game
Noteworthy: Prior to the 2009 meeting, the two teams had not played each other since the 1987 contest in Murfreesboro.

SCOUTING THE THUNDERING HERD

Marshall (21-13, 9-7 C-USA) made a strong run in the Conference USA Championship last week, winning three straight games before falling to Memphis in the title game on Saturday. The Thundering Herd finished the season with a 5-8 road record, with the last road victory coming at SMU on Feb. 18. Including the C-USA title game in Memphis, Marshall has dropped six of its last seven road games.

The Herd is led by all-conference second-team selection DeAndre Kane with 16.6 points per game. The team's second-leading scorer and all-conference third-teamer Damier Pitts is averaging 14.5 points per game. Dennis Tinnon, an all-defensive team honoree, tops the team on the boards with 9.9 per game and is third in scoring with 9.9 points per game.

ALL ABOUT MT (25-6, 14-2 SBC)

A glance at the fields

The NIT field features a pair of 2011-12 MT foes in Ole Miss and Akron. The Blue Raiders defeated both teams during the regular-season. Only three teams in the NIT field have more wins than the Blue Raiders this year - Drexel (27), Oral Roberts (27) and Nevada (26) - while four teams have a better RPI, according to the NCAA as of March 11 - Marshall (44), Oral Roberts (51), UCF (54) and Akron (55). MT currently sits at No. 57 in the NCAA RPI, higher than any of the No. 1, 2 and 3 seeds in each of the four NIT regional brackets and two of the other No. 4 seeds (excluding Oral Roberts,

also a No. 4 seed). Among the five NIT teams with the highest RPIs, MT and Oral Roberts were the highest seeds. Three opponents from MT's 2011-12 campaign qualified for the NCAA tournament. Those three opponents - Vanderbilt, Belmont and WKU - all earned automatic bids after winning their conference tournaments. MT split decisions with both Belmont and WKU, while taking Vanderbilt to the wire before suffering a seven-point loss. **Postseason Play**
MT is making its 10th postseason appearances in the 2012 NIT. The Blue Raiders made NIT appearances in 1986 and 1988, in addition to six NCAA tournament appearances (1975, 1977, 1982, 1985, 1987, 1989). MT's last postseason appearance was in the 2010 CollegeInsider.com Tournament. **Among the Nation's Elite**
The Blue Raiders are one of 13 teams with at least 25 wins and 10 road wins. Of those 13 teams, nine are among the NCAA field of 64 (Lehigh, Harvard, Murray State, Iona, Belmont, Norfolk State, Creighton, VCU, Wichita State) and three are in the NIT (MT, Oral Roberts, Drexel).

Blue Raiders Rake in Awards
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. 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.

It also 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.
Dendy Makes Blue Raider History
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.

Sun Belt Champions
With the win over Florida Atlantic on Feb. 18, MT clinched the Sun Belt's regular-season title and the No. 1 seed for the conference tournament. It marks the program's first No. 1 seed as a member of the Sun Belt. Additionally, MT's victory over ULM clinched the league's best record this season. The Blue Raiders have now finished atop the Sun Belt standings in two of the past three seasons, tying Troy and North Texas with a 13-5 record in 2009-10.

Dendy is Dandy
After sitting out last season due to NCAA transfer rules, LaRon Dendy has made an impact in his lone season 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. 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). Dendy added his sixth performance of 20 or

more points with 22 points at Vanderbilt (1/28), then posted his fifth double-double with career-highs in both points (26) and rebounds (14) against WKU on Feb. 9. He followed that up with a 23-point showing against UALR and made it three straight games of 20-or-more points with 20 against FAU. He added 10 rebounds in the contest for his sixth double-double of the season and second in three games. He now has nine games of at least 20 points. He has also shown versatility on the court, ranking first on the team in scoring (14.8 ppg) rebounding (7.0 rpg) and blocks (47) and third on the team with 64 assists.

More on Dendy's Dominance

Prior to his Sun Belt Player of the Year honor, senior forward LaRon Dendy was named the Sun Belt Player of the Week on Jan. 30 then again on Feb. 13. Dendy picked up his first career weekly honor and the second of the season for the Blue Raiders after averaging 19.5 points, 5.5 rebounds and 2.0 assists in two games during the week of Jan. 23. Dendy put together back-to-back double-digit scoring performances, including a career-high 22 points against Vanderbilt on Jan. 28. Over the two games, he shot an impressive 70 percent from the field while hitting 10-of-13 from the line. He also scored 17 against Troy on Jan. 26. He earned his second weekly accolade after averaging 24.5 points, 10.0 rebounds and 3.0 assists in wins over WKU and UALR. Dendy had a career day against rival WKU, posting his fifth double-double of the season with 26 points and 14 rebounds, both career-highs. He matched his career-high with four assists in the contest as well. The Greenville, S.C., native followed that up with his eighth game of 20-or-more points this season, scoring 23 as MT clinched the Sun Belt East Division title with a 68-60 victory over West champion UALR. Not only did Dendy score 19 points in the first half of the contest, but he also scored 12 in a row for the Blue Raiders to start the game. He finished the contest shooting nearly 82 percent from the field. Dendy joined Marcos Knight as the Blue Raiders who received weekly honors this season. Dendy became the first Blue Raider to receive multiple weekly honors in the same season and the third to earn multiple accolades in their career. He is the fifth Blue Raider overall to receive the league's weekly award. It marked the eighth weekly accolade in program history and the first time since the 2001-02 season MT had multiple player of the week awards.

Amazing Assists

MT has been one of the best assisting teams in the nation this season, and the Blue Raiders demonstrated that on Feb. 23 with a season-high 30 assists on 35 field goals against ULM. It marked the most assists in a game for a Blue Raider squad since MT tallied 32 against Trevecca on Nov. 14, 2008. The mark was also just two assists shy of the Sun Belt's record between two league teams, set by Louisiana against UTPA on Jan. 17, 1998.

Records Abound

With 25 wins this season, the Blue Raiders set a new single-season school record. MT has had 23 wins four times, with the most recent coming in the 1988-89 season. The Blue Raiders also cracked the 20-win mark for the first time since the 1990-91 season when they went 21-9. The last time MT cracked the 20-win mark during the regular season was the 1988-89 season when the Blue Raiders were 23-8, including three postseason victories. MT also set the record for most league wins in a season with 14. The Blue Raiders' previous record was 13 Sun Belt wins in 2009-10. MT's 37 league wins over the past three seasons are the most of any Sun Belt team.

An impressive stretch

Prior to the loss at Vanderbilt, MT had won 16 of 17, marking the best 17-game stretch in program

history. During the span, MT won 10 games by double-figures and have collected 18 double-digit wins overall.

Nation Taking Notice

MT received votes for 11 consecutive weeks in the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll before falling out in the latest poll released March 12. The Blue Raiders also received votes in the AP Top 25 earlier twice this season. MT garnered nine votes on Jan. 23 and 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 are also ranked No. 11 in the current CollegeInsider.com Mid-Major Top 25.

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's 20-2 start marked the best in school history. It topped the previous mark of 18-2 in 1974-75. Additionally, MT's 13 wins before the new year are the most in school history, surpassing the previous mark of nine in 1991. **And For League Starters**

MT's 10-0 Sun Belt start was the best conference mark in program history. The Blue Raiders broke the record of 9-0 set in the 1974-75 season as a member of the Ohio Valley Conference. **Gender Wars**

Both the Blue Raider men's and women's basketball programs got off to 10-0 starts in the Sun Belt. It marked 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 Sun Belt program has had both teams earn 10-0 starts. With a combined record of 51-12, the MT programs are tied for sixth nationally in wins and rank sixth in winning percentage.

Best of Both Worlds

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. **Streaking Raiders**

The Blue Raiders 12-game winning streak spanning from Dec. 10 through Jan. 26 was the longest since MT won a school-record 14 straight during the 1985-86 season. It ties the third-longest streak in school history, matching the 12-game mark during the 1980-81 season, and marks only the fourth time history MT has won at least 12 straight games. **One-Two Punch**

Bruce Massey and Marcos Knight are a dual threat when it comes to ball-handling. The duo ranks No. 1 and No. 4, respectively, in assist-to-turnover ratio in league games. Massey holds a 2.3 ratio, while Knight is at 1.6. Massey also ranks first overall in the league with a 2.3 ratio. Additionally, Massey holds a just over a 1.0 ratio in steals (50) and blocks (6) to turnovers (53), a stat that ranks among the nation's elite point guards.

Road Warriors

MT is currently 10-4 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' 10 road victories this season are tied for the 11th-most nationally and are the most in program history. MT has won nine road games three times in history, with the most recent coming in the 1997-98 season. And with six of road victories coming in league games this season, MT has collected 46 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 dominated during league play. In non-conference action, the Blue Raiders averaged 76.1 points per game, held opponents to 64.1 points per game, and shot 52.9 percent from the field, including a 41.2 percent from beyond the arc. Compare that to MT's 68.9 points per game, 47.2 percent shooting and 32.0 percent 3-point shooting in conference play. Despite cooling off offensively in league games, the Blue Raiders are holding opponents to 59.1 points per game, best in the conference, and have outscored their league foes by an average of 9.8 points per game. In fact, 11 of 16 conference foes scored 61 points or less.

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 15.5 assists per game. The Blue Raiders have 479 assists on 801 field goals, marking the most assists of any team during head coach Kermit Davis' tenure. The total is the most since MT had 484 in the 1999-2000 season. With six more assists, MT would have the most since collecting 518 in the 1996-97 season.

Home Sweet Home

MT finished the season on a 13-game winning streak at Murphy Center. The streak is the longest since MT won 14 in a row spanning the 1996-97 and 1997-98 seasons. It is the fifth-longest mark in history. With 14 wins at home this season, the Blue Raiders have collected double-digit home victories in each of the past five seasons and in eight out of 10 years during Davis' tenure. The 14 home wins are also tied for the most during the regular-season in program history. MT won 14 regular-season home games in 1973-74 and twice won 15 home games (1978-88, 1975-75), but each of those seasons included two postseason home victories. Additionally, this season marks the first since 1996-97 that the Blue Raiders suffered only one loss at home. MT finished 13-1 at home during the 1996-97 campaign. MT has finished undefeated at home four times in program history. MT's 8-0 home record in conference play is the best since the Blue Raiders finished 6-0 in 1988-89 as a member of the OVC. It marks the sixth time in program history MT has finished undefeated at home in conference play, but the first time during the Sun Belt era.