Trip to New York on the line as Blue Raiders welcome Golden Gophers

Contest slated for 6 p.m. CT on ESPN2

March 20, 2012 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - After a historic win over top-seeded Tennessee on Monday night, the fourth-seeded Blue Raider men's basketball team returns home to host No. 6 seed Minnesota Wednesday for the right to travel to New York for the semifinals of the National Invitation Tournament (NIT). The two teams will square off at 6 p.m. CT at Murphy Center and the game will air on ESPN2 with Brad Nessler and Jimmy Dykes on the call.

GAME INFORMATION
2012 National Invitation Tournament Bracket
Date: Wednesday, March 21
Time: 6:03 p.m. CT
Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Facility: Murphy Center

MEDIA INFORMATION
TV: ESPN2
Play-by-play: Brad Nessler
Analysis: Jimmy Dykes

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: ESPN3
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.
--As of the NCAA statistics on March 20, 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 19, MT is one of only four teams in the nation with at least 27 wins and 11 road wins.
--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 NIT HISTORY

--MT has made two previous appearances in the NIT, in 1986 and 1988.
--MT hosted three games in the 1988 NIT, winning the first two before falling to Boston College. Ironically, the first-round win was an 85-80 victory over Tennessee.
--MT's 86-78 win over Marshall marked the first postseason victory for the Blue Raiders since a 1989 NCAA tournament win. It is the program's first NIT win since 1988.
--MT is now 4-2 all-time in NIT games, including a 1-0 second-round record.
--The Blue Raiders are the first Sun Belt team to win an NIT game since WKU in 2005. The last time the Sun Belt had a team advance past the second round was UAB in 1989.

SERIES INFORMATION

--Overall: Series tied, 1-1 (not including two UM wins vacated in 1993 and 1994)
--At MT: Only meeting vacated by UM (UM 90, MT 76 on 12/3/93)
--Under Davis: First meeting
--First meeting: MT 92, UM 79 (11/23/85 in Hawaii)
--Last meeting (vacated): UM 98, MT 57 (12/31/94 in Minneapolis)
--Last meeting (non-vacated): UM 88, MT 65 (12/12/92 in Minneapolis)
--Current Streak: UM, 1 game (3 including vacated UM wins)

SCOUTING THE GOPHERS

No. 6 seed Minnesota (21-14, 6-12 Big Ten) enters Wednesday's game having won four of their last five, including a 78-60 win over Miami on Monday. Prior to that, the Gopher had dropped six straight. Minnesota owns a 5-6 road record, with two of those victories coming in the Gophers' first two NIT games. Before the NIT, the Gophers had dropped four of their last five road contests. Minnesota is led by Rodney Williams, averaging 11.7 points and 5.6 rebounds per game. Julian Welch is also averaging double-figures at 10.2 points per game.

ALL ABOUT MT (27-6, 14-2 SBC)

A Massey-terful Performance

Bruce Massey became the fourth different Blue Raider this season to post a double-double with his career day at Tennessee. Massey finished with career highs in points (20), rebounds (10), field goals (6) and free throws (8). He is also the first Blue Raider this season to lead the team in points, rebounds, assists, blocks and steals all in one game. He had four assists, the Blue Raiders' only block and three steals in the contests. **Home Sweet Home**

MT is currently riding 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. A win Wednesday would tie the fourth-longest mark in history. With 15 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 15 home wins are also tied for the most in program history. MT has twice previously won 15 home games (1978-88, 1975-75), each of those seasons including two postseason home victories. Additionally, this season marks the first since 1996-97 that the Blue Raiders have 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. **Dendy Claims Lou Henson Vote**

LaRon Dendy took first place in the fan vote for the Lou Henson Player of the Year Award, edging Creighton's Doug McDermott by 58 votes to claim the title. Murray State's Isaiah Canaan rounded out the top three. Dendy received 773 votes, accounting for 16.53 percent of the overall voting. McDermott collected 715 votes (15.29%) and Canaan had 457 votes (9.78%). The Lou Henson Award is presented annually to the top mid-major player in Division I basketball. The fan vote counts for one-third of the final selection. A CollegeInsider.com Selection Committee comprises the final two-thirds of the vote. The winner will be announced on March 30 in New Orleans, La.

NABC Honorees

LaRon Dendy and Marcos Knight racked up more accolades, earning NABC All-District 24 honors. Dendy was named to the first team, while Knight received second-team accolades. Dendy and Knight represent the third and fourth NABC selections in MT history, joining James Washington and Desmond Yates, who each earned first-team honors. This marks the first year the Blue Raiders have had multiple honorees in the same season.

Another Milestone

The Blue Raiders added to an already historic season with their first postseason victory since 1989. The 86-78 win over Marshall marked the first postseason victory for MT since 1989 when the Blue Raiders earned a 97-83 win over Florida State in the NCAA tournament. The last time MT won an NIT game was in 1988 against Georgia in the tournament's second round, a game that also took place in Murfreesboro. Ironically, the team the Blue Raiders defeated in the first round of the 1988 NIT was Tennessee and with Monday's win, MT is now 2-0 against the Vols in the postseason. MT snapped a nine-game skid against the Vols and earned its first win at Tennessee.

And Making Sun Belt History

With the win over Marshall on Tuesday, the Blue Raiders became the first Sun Belt team to win a game in the NIT since WKU in 2005. The win over Tennessee makes MT the first Sun Belt team since UAB in 1989 to advance past the second round of the tournament. UAB made it all the way to the semifinals before falling to St. John's, then defeated Michigan State in the consolation final.

A glance at the fields
The 2012 NIT field featured a pair of MT foes from this season in Ole Miss and Akron. The Blue Raiders defeated both teams during the regular-season.

Only three teams in the initial NIT field had more wins than the Blue Raiders entering the tournament - Drexel (27), Oral Roberts (27) and Nevada (26) - while four teams had 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, now the highest remaining RPI of any NIT team and 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 four teams with at least 26 wins and 10 road wins. All 10 teams qualified for postseason play, with seven of them among the NCAA field of 64 (Harvard, Murray State, Belmont, Lehigh, Creighton, VCU, Wichita State) and three in the NIT (MT, Oral Roberts, Drexel). Only four teams, including the Blue Raiders, have at least 27 wins and 11 road wins (Muray State, Lehigh, Drexel).

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.

Records Abound
With 27 wins this season, the Blue Raiders set a new single-season school record. MT 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.

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. 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 now has nine games of at least 20 points. He has also shown versatility on the court, ranking first on the team in scoring (14.7 ppg) rebounding (7.2 rpg) and blocks (48) and third on the team with 69 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.

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.

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 53-12, the MT programs are sixth nationally in wins and rank fifth 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 ranked 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 2.2 ratio. Additionally, Massey holds a just over a 1.0 ratio in steals (54) and blocks (8) to turnovers (61), a stat that ranks among the nation's elite point guards. As the chief ball handler, Massey has only had five games where he had more turnovers than assists, and he is averaging 5.4 assists per game over the last eight contests.

Road Warriors

MT finished the season 11-4 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 MT won at least four consecutive road games in a season was 2006-07 when MT claimed five in a row during league play. The Blue Raiders' 11 road victories this season are tied for the sixth-most nationally and are the most in program history. MT had won nine road games three times in history, with the most recent coming in the 1997-98 season. With six road victories coming in league games this year, MT has collected 46 league road victories in the past 10 years, the most of any Sun Belt school.

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 the nation this year, currently ranking 20th nationally with 15.6 assists per game. The Blue Raiders have 514 assists on 857 field goals, marking the most assists of any team during head coach Kermit Davis' tenure. The total is the most since MT collected 518 in the 1996-97 season. With five more assists, the Blue Raiders will have the most since collecting 533 in 1989.

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