

Dominating performance carries Raiders to second round of WNIT

Blue Raiders force 38 turnovers and hit 11 treys in victory

November 9, 2012 · @MTAthletics

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - A combination of 38 forced turnovers and 11 triples carried Middle Tennessee women's basketball to a dominating 87-45 win against Kennesaw State in the first round of the WNIT.

The Blue Raiders (1-0) took control early and never look back as they picked up their first 40+ win since beating Louisiana by 52 last season. It was a solid night for the blue and white, as MT finished up with 22 steals and 18 assists. KSU (0-1) shot 52 percent (18-of-35), but were outrebounded 45-to-27.



Middle Tennessee moves to the second round of the WNIT and will face in-state rival Memphis in a 2 p.m. game on Sunday afternoon at the Murphy Center.

Ebony Rowe scored a game-high 23 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for her 33rd career double-double. The junior, who was honored with her 1,000-point club ball before the game, moved to 21st all-time in school history with 1,092 points. Rowe surpassed Joanne Aluka's previous mark of 1,090.

The Lexington product also grabbed nine rebounds off the glass to move to third all-time in school history with 338, passing Patrice Holmes.

Two other Blue Raiders reached double-figures. Kortni Jones was a remarkable 5-of-12 from three point range and hit a career-tying eight field goals for 21 points. Jones moved into eighth all-time with 178 all-time triples, again passing Holmes.

All-Conference performer Icelyn Elie tallied 10 points and grabbed seven boards with two steals. Starters Leonard and Shanice Cason also rounded strong performances. Leonard tied for a career-high seven rebounds, five which came off the defensive glass. Cason scored eight points, collected

a team-high and career-tying six steals, while dishing out four assists in the span of 28 minutes.

The Raiders opened game with a four point lead as Cason hit a front-end of a free throw and Laken Leonard followed in the next possession with a trey. KSU tied up the game with baskets from Kristina Wells and Chantel Kennedy.

A 17-4 run extended the Blue Raiders advantage to 21-8 with just 10 minutes left in the half. An 18 point cushion was built up before KSU went on a five run spurt capped by a Brian Young triple to pull within 10 with 1:45 left in the opening half.

There was a 14-point edge for MT at the midway point. Rowe led all scorers with 13 points and eight rebounds. Rowe was 5-of-8 from the field. 12 Raider points were scored off turnovers as MT outmanned the Owls on the boards, 24-16.

To start the second half, the Raiders opened on an 11-0 run. The Raiders extended its lead to a 20 when Jones pick-pocketed KSU and scored a basket. Ebony Rowe followed with another steal and a layup with a plus-one.

The Raiders picked up in shooting, knocking down 45 percent of their shots in the second half and finishing the game with 41 percent (33-of-81). MT stretched its lead to 46 with 2:09 left in the game to advance to the second round of the WNIT.

Lauren March came off the bench to add seven points and grab five rebounds. KeKe Stewart performed strong with five boards and four points.

On Sunday, the Blue Raiders remain at the Murphy Center to take Memphis in a 2 p.m. tipoff. ESPN3 will carry the action live. The contest is Veterans Appreciation Day, as all current and former military members and their families receive free admission. Fans are also encouraged to bring a brand new unwrapped toy to donate to Toys for Tots.

NOTES...

Kortni Jones moved into eighth all-time with 50x career attempts, passing Heather Prater's benchmark of 502 set between 1993-96 ... Ebony Rowe moved past legend Patrice Holmes with nine offensive rebounds on Friday ... Rowe now has 338 in her career . . . Junior transfer Janiece Johnson scored her first career basket at the 14:47 mark to give MT a 54-27 lead ... Jones then moved to eighth all-time with 178 triples to tie Patrice Homes ... Rowe collected her 62nd double-figure scoring game her 33rd double-figure rebounding and 33rd double-double ... Rowe moved into 21st all-time, passing with Joanne Aluka with 1,090 points. Jackson County native Caroline Warden made her collegiate debut, scoring a triple in the contest.

QUOTES

Junior Forward Ebony Rowe

On defensive intensity in the first half versus the second half...

I would say coach was pretty disappointed in our defensive effort the first half. Yes, we were up, but we knew we were not playing to our potential. We should have stopped them more than we did. This past week, all we've been working on is defense. I think we touched the ball once this week. He was

disappointed that we put so much emphasis on it this week and didn't show it on the court. I think my teammates and I really stepped up the second half. I was definitely stressed at halftime, and we came out and produced.

On expectations from Kennesaw State...

We didn't know much, but we knew they were going to push it, like they did, and we knew they were going to have good shooters, which they did. What we didn't know, they came out and showed us, but I think we handled it a little better in the second half.

On planning for other teams...

We're really just focusing on us. Instead of putting so much emphasis on our opponent and who we're playing, if we come out every day and every game and play our game, then we're going to win. We have confidence in ourselves that as long as we focus on what we do and do what we do best, then we'll be fine.

Interest in Top 25 polls...

We don't, but I'm sure the coach does. We don't really play much into that. I think as a team we kind of like being the underdog. We're not the big name schools, but we work as hard as them. It's okay if they don't respect us and give us those votes. We're just going to go out and prove to them that we deserve those votes.

Senior Guard Kortni Jones

On miscommunication in first half...

I think the big thing is recognizing what exactly is open. Coach was stressing that we needed to make it more inside out and not focus so much on the perimeter. It was kind of a miscommunication because we usually are able to do everything. And then when a team kind of takes it away, it's hard for a player to notice that. Once we started going inside and out, it opened up everything. Ebony was work and get her points and she was also able to kick it out once they came.

On getting the first win...

It feels good to actually play the first game, and you only have one first game. It felt good to get a win...a good win, especially that the second half. It felt really good to get that win under our belt. We're going to come in tomorrow and work hard. We've got a big game against Memphis. We know they're athletic, so we're trying to get prepared quickly.

On receiving top 25 votes.

We feel like we work hard and put in just as much effort and time as any other team. It kind of lights a fire under us. It's fine that we didn't get it, but I think by the end of the season they'll recognize that we should've been. We're thankful for the votes that we do get-we don't want to overlook that. It's kind of like they don't believe in us, but we have to believe in ourselves to get there. Our main goal is to win this WNIT tournament and I'm pretty sure we'll get in the Top 25.

Head Coach Rick Insell

On the intensity first half versus the second half...

We really talked about getting up in the lanes, talked about going inside. We had Ebony, Ice and Keke open all day in the first half, and we just didn't throw them the basketball. We got out of our offense, and it was really more us than them. You've got to give them credit though. They were oversized and I think our kids are a little more athletic than they expected.

On the play of forward Keke Stewart...

I thought Keke Stewart came in and did a very good job for us. We're practicing her very limited, limited minutes, but she came in and didn't miss a beat. She's so smart, and she's got so much basketball IQ that it's unbelievable. If we can get that knee a little bit more healthy, I think you're going to see a very different Keke Stewart.

On the next round of the WNIT

I really don't know who we're going to play. We've seen a little film on Memphis and we've got some things coming in tonight on Grambling, but I'd say that's probably going to be a pretty good game. They're playing at Memphis, so that's got to give them a little bit of an edge, but they have to come here and that's what I'm happy about.

On receiving Top 25 votes...

I think we've been in the top 25 in every poll but that one, and I was kind of wondering about that, because I think when you come from 12 on back, I think we're as good as anybody, and then they put us at 27th. It didn't upset them, but it kind of upset me to be honest with you. I felt like we did enough last year and we've have the same bunch coming back. I just felt like they were maybe not showing us the respect that we so deserve. I

On expecting to get votes in the Top 25...

I thought there were a couple years when we didn't get votes and deserved them. You've just got to keep battling.

Printed on July 24, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/63919>