Elie's career-high 30 points carry Blue Raiders to WNIT Semifinals

Middle Tennessee visits Iowa on Wednesday

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Led by a career-high 30 points by senior forward Icelyn Elie, Middle Tennessee women's basketball defeated the Memphis Tigers, 82-68, on Sunday afternoon at the Murphy Center. The win moved the Blue Raiders into the semifinals of the Preseason WNIT.

Elie, a Lebanon native, made a career-high 13 field goals, including tying a career-high with three 3-pointers, and had five rebounds. Three other Blue Raiders scored in double-figures on Sunday. Ebony Rowe scored 19 points and pulled down a game-high seven rebounds. Kortni Jones had 14 points and a game-high eight assists. Shanice Cason was 6-for-6 at the free throw line, scoring 10 points with five rebounds and four assists.

Middle Tennessee (2-0) opened the game with a quick 8-2 spurt in the first 1:48, getting threes from Elie and Laken Leonard. Memphis (1-1) responded with an 8-2 run of its own as a Mooriah Rowser basket tied the game 10-10 with 15:47 remaining in the opening half. The Raiders took the lead back 12 seconds later on an Elie layup from Jones, then got a Shanice Cason basket and a three from Elie to take a 17-12 lead at the 14:01 mark of the opening half.

MT grew its lead to nine with 12:20 to play in the first as back-to-back triples by Jones and Elie made the score 25-16. Elie's three was her third of the first half, tying a career-high. Just as they did to start, the Tigers made a run to get back in the game. Ariel Hearn started an 11-0 Memphis run with a three, as layups by Jaymie Jackson and Nicole Dickson gave the Tigers their first lead of the game, 27-25, with 8:48 to go in the half. Memphis led 29-27 when MT got a basket from Ebony Rowe and a three from Jones to take a 32-29 lead. The Tigers closed to within one, 32-31, before a Rowe jumper started an 11-1 Raiders run that put MT in front 43-32. The Blue Raiders shot 65 perecent from the field in the first half to take a 45-36 lead into the locker room.

Memphis stayed within striking range to start the second half. The Tigers closed the gap to five, 49-44, at the 15:46 mark on an Ann Jones putback. MT pulled away with six straight points from Elie and Cason to take a 55-44 lead with 14:14 remaining, the Raiders' largest lead up to that point. The Tigers drew back to within seven with 12:56 to go on an Abdul-Qaadir basket to make the score 55-48, but the MT defense stepped it up from there.

The Blue Raiders held UM to three made field goals over the next 7:36 of play. During that stretch, MT got its lead back up to double-figures as a pair of Cason foul shots gave the Lady Raiders a 59-48 lead with 12:19 to play. The lead eventually grew to 15 at the 6:05 mark as an Elie steal turned into a fastbreak layup for Cason, putting MT ahead of the Tigers 70-55. Memphis only got as close as nine points the rest of the way. Rowe scored nine of the Blue Raiders' last 12 points to give MT the 82-68 win.

MT finished the game shooting 56 percent from the floor as Memphis shot 44 percent. The Lady Raiders out-rebounded the Tigers 32-to-31 and turned 16 Memphis turnovers into 18 points. MT also held a 42-28 advantage in points in the paint. Abdul-Qaadir led the Tigers with 16 points and four steals.

The Blue Raiders visit Iowa in the semifinals of the Preseason WNIT on Wednesday night. The Hawkeyes defeated Illinois State 74-64 on Sunday afternoon. Tipoff is set for 7 p.m. at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

NOTES

Icelyn Elie tied a career-high with three triples in the first eight minutes of the game ... Elie set a career-high with 13 field goals made and 30 points ... Breaking her previous best of 29 points and 12 field goals against UALR on March 6, 2012 ... Shanice Cason set a season-high with five rebounds ... Kortni Jones tallied eight assists in the span of 40 minutes ... Middle Tennessee advances to the semifinals of the Preseason WNIT Tournament for the first time.

QUOTES

Head Coach Rick Insell

On how Memphis matched up with MT...

"They probably had more athleticism than we did if you look at each player coming down the line. I think in some positions we matched up with them. We knew the (Nicole) Dickson kid was a player. Last year, she was an all-conference player and she had already been voted preseason all-conference. We knew the point guard was tough. She's one of the best point guards in that conference. The younger kids came in and did a good job. She's doing a real good job with them."

On Icelyn Elie's performance ...

"That's Alysha Clark, Amber Holt figures there offensively and defensively. This game and the finals of the Sun Belt Conference tournament last season may be her best games. She wasn't going to be denied there and I think she made a few big shots today."

On how to handle an athletic team like Memphis...

"A lot of coaches feel that when you come in with a team like that you need to slow it down. I don't. I never have. I felt like when you play a team like that you have to push it on them. You have to make them defend. How many layups did Kortni (Jones) and Shanice (Cason) get, and how many times did our post players beat them back because they had their heads turned? We knew that coming in. Not many teams will take that opportunity and push it against teams like Memphis. I've always felt like that's what you got to do against teams like that."

On playing Iowa on Wednesday

"I know they got a lot of basketball IQ. I know they've got some good shooters. Their best player is back from injury. They were second in the Big Ten last year. They have a good team, a good program."

Junior Forward Ebony Rowe
On keeping Memphis in check...

"Coach always emphasizes that other teams are going to go on runs. He always prepares us for that. We just kept our cool. Whenever they closed that gap, we remained calm and stayed together. We knew we were going to extend the lead again. I think at the end of the game we kept pushing and they got tired."

On the importance of Sunday's win...

"We looked at this game as a way to prepare us for what we have to do in March. We're taking every game and every opportunity. We don't want to miss an opportunity to get an automatic bid in March, secure our place in the tournament, and get that good seeding. We're dreaming big and we're just taking it game by game to get there."

Forward Icelyn Elie

On her chemistry with Rowe and Kortni Jones...

"The thing is, I think we have a good team chemistry. Between the three of us, I think we have that down pat."

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