Defensive pressure carries Raiders to conference opening win

Four Blue Raiders reach double-digit scoring

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LAFAYETTE, La. - Middle Tennessee had four players reach double-figures as the Blue Raiders defeated Louisiana 72-45 in both team's Sun Belt opener on Saturday at Earl K. Long Gym.

The victory gave MT (4-1, 1-0 Sun Belt) its 17th straight conference win in the regular season dating back to last season's perfect 16-0 run. A stout defensive game by the Raiders forced 36 turnovers and scored 41 points. MT shot 46 percent (30-of-66) and hit eight triples in the win. Louisiana (2-3, 0-1 SBC) won the rebounding battle, 43-36.

MT opened up on a 22-4 run before stretching their lead to 21 points in the first half. Louisiana cut the game within 15 in the second half, but MT used defensive pressure to close out with a 27 point win.

Ebony Rowe led all scorers with 21 points and eight rebounds. The junior connected on 10-of-18 shots, grabbing four steals with two assists and two blocks.

Senior Icelyn Elie anchored 15 points with six rebounds in 26 minutes. Kortni Jones hit three beyond the arch and added a pair of jump shots for 13 points. The guard handed out seven assists, while picking up two steals and a block.

Reaching double-digits for the first time in two years, KeKe Stewart shot 4-of-6 from the field for 10 points. Freshman MacKenize Sells belted two triples in her second career game, while pacing 13 minutes on the court.

The Blue Raiders started the contest with 10-4 lead. Rowe registered six points during that stretch. From there the Blue Raiders continue to play aggressive offense, stretching their lead to 22 points at

the 11 minute mark.

Louisiana snapped a five minute scoreless streak with a basket from Byronesha Santiago. Kortni Jones scored her fourth basket in the first half to extend the lead to 28-9. To end the half, Stewart hit a baseline triple to give MT a 41-22 edge at the half.

MT shot 50 percent (17-of-34) at the halfway point with Rowe (14) and Jones (10) in double figures. The Blue Raiders forced 20 Ragin' Cajuns turnovers, scoring 26 points in the process. Louisiana outrebounded MT 26-14 in the first half, including 13-9 on the defensive glass.

A six point run cut the Blue Raiders lead to 48-31 with 14 minutes left in the contest. Triples by Sells and Jones upped the Raiders advantage to 54-31 at the midway point in the second half.

The Raiders continued to apply defensive pressure, giving plenty of opportunities to stretch the lead. MT opened to a 27 point edge to close out the game and improve to 18-0 all-time against UL.

On Wednesday, the Blue Raiders travel to No. 15/20 Tennessee. Tipoff is set for 6 p.m. Central at Thompson-Boling Arena.

Notes

Kortni Jones (362) moved into 10th all-time with 7 assists, passing Janet Ross' mark of 355 ... Eight rebounds by Ebony Rowe moved her to ninth on the Blue Raiders rebounding list with 696 boards, passing Chrissy Givens and Kim Webb's total of 692 ... MacKenzie Sells knocked down two triples in the game for a career-high ... Dymon Raynor and Stephanie Myers made an appearance for the first time this season ... Saturday's win helped Middle Tennessee stretch its win streak to 17 consecutive regular season games ... KeKe Stewart reached a season high with 10 points ... Shanice Cason registered five assists and four points in 32 minutes.

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