Blue Raiders open Sun Belt play at Louisiana Thursday

Tipoff slated for 7 p.m. at Cajundome

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee men's basketball team opens Sun Belt play on Thursday against Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. from the Cajundome in Lafayette, La.

GAME INFORMATION
Date: Thursday, Nov. 29
Time: 7 p.m. CT
Location: Lafayette, La.
Facility: Cajundome

MEDIA INFORMATION
Radio: WNSR (560 AM)/WGNS (1450 AM, 101.9 FM, 100.5 FM)/WMOT (89.5 FM)
Play-by-Play: Chip Walters

Live Video - Live Audio - Live Stats

Twitter: @MTAthletics, @MT_MBB

SERIES INFORMATION

- Overall: MT leads, 10-6 // As Sun Belt foes: MT leads, 8-6
- In Lafayette: Series tied, 3-3
- Under coach Davis: MT leads, 7-5
- First meeting: MT 85, UL 79 (1/23/59 in Lafayette)
- First Sun Belt meeting: UL 85, MT 57 (2/17/01 in Lafayette)
- Last year: MT 65, UL 53 (1/7/12 in Murfreesboro)
- Current Streak: MT, 7 games
- Longest MT streak: 7 games (1/28/06-present) // Longest UL streak: 5 games (1/25/03-3/6/05)
- Noteworthy: MT has not lost to UL since March 6, 2005, when the Blue Raiders suffered a 71-57 defeat in the second round of the Sun Belt Championship.

- Noteworthy: The Blue Raiders have won the last two meetings in Lafayette and have not lost in Lafayette since a 54-44 setback on Jan. 29, 2005.

BLUE RAIDER FASTBREAK POINTS

- The Blue Raiders currently rank 19th in the country with 16.8 assists per game.
- Shawn Jones posted his third career double-double and second in as many games against Texas Southern on Nov. 24 with a career-high 21 points and 12 rebounds to earn Sun Belt Player of the Week honors.
- After starting last season 4-0 and with the 4-1 start this season, MT is off to its best back-to-back starts since the 1986-87 and 1987-88 seaons. MT started 1986-87 5-0 and 1987-88 6-1.
- MT got off to a 2-0 start for the second year in a row, marking the first back-to-back occurrences since the 1995-96 and 1996-97 seasons.
- The 97 points against Alabama State in the season-opener marked the most since MT scored 109 against Houston Baptist on Feb. 13, 2010.
- MT was unanimously picked to win the Sun Belt East Division this year by the league's head coaches.
- Four Blue Raiders earned preseason all-conference honors. Marcos Knight was named to the first team, JT Sulton and Bruce Massey to the second team and Raymond Cintron to the third team.
- Raymond Cintron was rated as the No. 39 shooter in the country according to CBSSports.com's Top 50 shooters.

SCOUTING LOUISIANA

- The Ragin' Cajuns are coming off a close one at No. 15 Michigan State, dropping a 63-60 decision on Sunday to move to 2-4 on the season
- Louisiana returns four letterwinners, including one starter, from a team that finished 16-16 overall and 10-6 in the league last year
- Shawn Long currently leads Louisiana, averaging 15.2 points and 7.7 rebounds per game
- Elfrid Payton is second on the team with 12.3 points and 5.2 rebounds per game

SUN BELT OPENERS

MT is 7-3 in Sun Belt openers under Kermit Davis and 7-5 overall. The Blue Raiders have never met the Ragin' Cajuns in their league opener.

LAST TIME OUT

Led by a career-high 21 points and game-high 12 rebounds from junior forward Shawn Jones, Middle Tennessee cruised to a 79-52 win over the Texas Southern Tigers at the Murphy Center on Saturday.

Jones made 9-of-12 shots from the field and pulled down nine offensive rebounds. His double-double was his second in as many games. As a team, the Blue Raiders turned 18 offensive rebounds into 18 second chance points. Marcos Knight added 14 points and eight rebounds. Neiko Hunter was the third Blue Raider in double-figures, putting up 13 points. MT shot 47.7 percent from the field for the game.

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONES'

Shawn Jones raked in the Sun Belt and Tennessee Sports Writers Association Player of the Week

awards after posting a pair of double-doubles against UCF and Texas Southern. He tallied 18 points and 13 rebounds, both career-highs, in a 75-61 win over UCF on Tuesday. The Hialeah, Fla., native followed that up by setting a new career-high with 21 points and also grabbed 12 boards in a 79-52 victory over Texas Southern on Saturday. For the week, Jones averaged 19.5 points and 12.5 rebounds while shooting 66.7 percent from the field. He is the only Blue Raider to start every game this season and has scored double figures in three straight games.

HALFTIME ADJUSTMENTS

MT has taken advantage of making halftime adjustments this year. The Blue Raiders are averaging nearly seven points more in the second half (38.8) than the first (32.0) and shooting 48.9 percent in the second half compared to 40.8 percent in the first, including 45.5 percent from 3-point range in the second compared to 36.1 percent in the first. Opponents are shooting 37.6 percent in the second half compared to 44.7 in the first, with a difference in 3-point shooting of 27.9 percent in the second to 30.6 percent in the first.

BENCH PRODUCTION

With 10 of the top 12 scorers returning from last season's team, it's no surprise that MT has a deep bench. The Blue Raider bench currently owns a 170-69 advantage over its opponents.

OUT-REBOUNDING OPPONENTS

The Blue Raiders have out-rebounded their opponent in all five contests this season. MT currently owns a 193-153 rebounding advantage, an average of 38.6 compared to 30.6.

ONE-TWO PUNCH

Bruce Massey and Tweety Knight have already established themselves as a strong one-two punch at point for MT. Knight ranks second in assist-to-turnover ratio (3.0) in the Sun Belt, while Massey is third (2.5). Knight is averaging 3.6 apg, sixth in the league, and Massey is at 3.0 apg, ninth in the league.

FIVE GAMES, FIVE LINE-UPS

Through the first five games, head coach Kermit Davis has used five different lineups. The only mainstay each game has been Shawn Jones. James Gallman has made four starts, while Bruce Massey, Marcos Knight and Neiko Hunter each have three starts. Tweety Knight and Kerry Hammonds have started two games apiece and Jacquez Rozier, Raymond Cintron and JT Sulton have each started one game.

A LITTLE HELP

After ranking 21st nationally in assists per game last year, MT's unselfishness has already been apparent in its first two games. The Blue Raiders had 27 assists on 33 baskets in the season-opener against Alabama State and through five games have 84 assists on 124 field goals, which means about 68 percent of field goals have come from an assist. The Blue Raiders rank 19th nationally with 16.8 assists per game.

SOLID DEBUTS

Two key newcomers wasted no time making an impact in their Blue Raider debuts against Alabama State. Junior guard Tweety Knight earned the start and collected a game-high five assists to go along with nine points and three rebounds. Junior forward Neiko Hunter came off the bench for nine points, three rebounds, two assists and a block.

HIGH SCORING

The 97 points against Alabama State on Nov. 9 marked the most since MT scored 109 against Houston Baptist on Feb. 13, 2010. MT cracked the 90 plateau twice last season, scoring 90 against Austin Peay and 94 against ULM.

CINTRON RECEIVES RECOGNITION

Raymond Cintron was listed at No. 39 on CBSSports.com's Top 50 shooters for the 2012-13 season after hitting 43.2 percent of his shots from beyond the arc last season. The San Juan, Puerto Rico, native ranked sixth in the Sun Belt in 3-point shooting and was ninth with 2.0 treys per game. Overall, Cintron shot 45 percent from the field and averaged 8.4 points per game. Middle Tennessee will also face four shooters on the list throughout the 2012-13 season. Florida's Erik Murphy, Texas Southern's Omar Strong, Belmont's Ian Clark and Tennessee State's Robert Covington were listed among the top 50.

DENDY UPDATE

The regular season is underway for former Blue Raider LaRon Dendy. The 2012 Sun Belt Player of the Year has started every game for Kolossos this year. The Greenville, S.C., native is currently the team's leading scorer and rebounder, averaging 16.6 points and 4.4 boards per game.

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