

Second half run propels Raiders past Xavier

Rowe moves to second all-time with 37th career double-double

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

On a night when Middle Tennessee honored 40 years of Title IX, the Blue Raiders closed out the contest on a 21-6 run over the final 11 minutes, defeating Xavier 63-48.

The Blue Raiders (6-3) shot 43 percent (26-of-61) and scored 42 points inside the paint to notch their 14th consecutive victory at home. The home court winning streak is now tied for the nation's 10th longest. Xavier (4-4) knocked down 50 percent (20-of-40) of their attempts, but fell victim to 27 turnovers that resulted in 23 MT points.



Ebony Rowe notched her fifth double-double of the season and her 37th of her career with 24 points and 14 rebounds. She also reached double-digits for the 70th time during her two-plus seasons.

Senior Icelyn Elie was second on the team with 13 points and six rebounds. For the second consecutive game Janay Brinkley ratcheted a career-best with 10 points in 28 minutes.

Elie scored MT's first points of the night after drilling a three-pointer from the right baseline, which sparked a 7-0 run by the Raiders. After trading baskets over the next three minutes, Rowe snagged a defensive rebound around the 13 minute mark and darted a pass down to a wide-open Elie in the lane for two points, giving MT a 13-10 lead.

MT and Xavier held steady at 16-16 before Kortni Jones swished a three-pointer from the top of the key with a hand in her face to put MT up by three with 7:51 remaining in the first half. Jones wrapped up Thursday with eight points, two assists and a pair of steals.

Elie dominated the offensive lane much of the first half, scoring eight of her 11 first half points in the paint and grabbing one offensive rebound. Rowe matched her step-for-step, finishing the half with eight points and five rebounds.

The Blue Raiders ended the first half up four, 32-28, after shooting 48 percent from the field (14-of-29) and 38 percent (3-of-8) from three-point range. The Musketeers were 11-22 and the field and shot 33 percent (2-of-6) behind the arc.

The Blue Raiders started slow in the second half, not scoring their first bucket until Shanice Cason hit a 3-pointer at the 16:53 mark. She finished with six points, five steals and three assists in 38 minutes. The game remained close momentarily, as MT attempted to pull away with a six-point lead at the 13:41 mark. , The Musketeers slowly creep back on a 6-0 run, sparked by two field goals from Jessica Pachko.

At the 11:52 mark, Middle Tennessee took control with a strong offensive attack. Rowe ignited a 19-2 MT run over the next nine minutes to put the game away. The Lexington, Ky., product scored the first five points of the run and the Blue Raiders pulled away, helped by Xavier's cold shooting and sloppy play down the stretch. In the final 11 minutes, Xavier was 1-for-6 from the field with nine turnovers. The Raiders held the Musketeers to their lowest point production of the season.

The Blue Raiders hit the road Sunday, Dec. 9, as they visit No. 7/6 Kentucky at Noon. Sunday's game is televised on Fox Sports Tennessee and on ESPN3 in non-market areas. Middle Tennessee returns home after an 11-day break to face FIU on Thursday, Dec. 20 at 7 p.m.

NOTES

Kortni Jones moved to sixth all-time with Chelsia Lymon (2007-10) with one triple on Thursday to reach 196 in her career ... Jones, a native of Oak Ridge, also moved to eighth on the top 10 assists list, passing Anne Marie Lanning's (2008-11) total of 376 with two on Saturday ... Ebony Rowe earned her 37th double-double with 24 points and 14 rebounds, moving into a three-way tie with Alysha Clark and Jennifer McFall for second all-time ... Janay Brinkley set a career-high with 10 points, notching a personal best for two consecutive games ... Middle Tennessee now leads the all-time series with Xavier, 5-4 ... MT is 20-3 when Ebony Rowe reaches 20-plus points in a game ... Thursday's attendance was 3,227 ... MT is averaging 5,603 per game this season ... Coach Rick Insell (180) is just two wins away from reach Lewis Bivens (182) for all-time winningest coach at Middle Tennessee.

QUOTES

Head Coach Rick Insell

On the win over Xavier

I was real proud of our team. We played more like a team tonight. Kortni (Jones) didn't have one of her better games tonight, but she did a lot of things that a lot of people didn't see. We probably should have had more assists, but when Ebony Rowe hit those first one or two, I knew we needed to get the ball to her. Janay Brinkley had another good game tonight.

On the play of Ebony Rowe

I got a little ill at Kortni one time because after she had scored three times in a row, we went away from (Ebony). When she's scoring, we need to go to her, give her a chance to miss one, and when we went back to her, she scored another three or four in a row. I think that was a big lesson to our

kids tonight. When she gets on a roll, she's pretty tough. She's our go-to player. She gets a little ill when I ask her to step up to another level, but then she goes out there, skips that level, and goes to the next one. I challenged her tonight. I told her she was our go-to player, now get back out there and act like it. She went back out there and took over.

On the play of Janay Brinkley

This has been back-to-back career highs for Janay in our last two games. We've known all along that she is very talented, it's just getting her to step out of her shell.

On taking control late in the game

We didn't panic and that was what I was looking for. We made plays. That was a big play that Janay (Brinkley) made, the driving layup. Icelyn (Elie) made a big tip when we needed it.

On the progress of the season so far

I feel that right now we should be undefeated. South Dakota State is the only team that has really took us out of it, but we were flat give-out because of all those road games. We had Iowa beat and we deserved to win the Tennessee game. If we had gone out to South Dakota State undefeated, that one might have turned out different. But we deserve to be undefeated right now going into Kentucky (on Sunday). But we are not and we've grown from it. We've come back and had some tough practices and that is what has been tough on this team. We have to have tough practices to correct the things we are weak at, and then we had to go play games. We have to play Kentucky on Sunday afternoon, but Kentucky has to play a game Friday night, so they've got one day to get ready for us. And they know we played with Tennessee. We are not going to be somebody that they can freshen their team up on before they go to conference play.

Junior Forward Ebony Rowe

On her scoring run in the second half

Coach Insell is my greatest motivator and he knows exactly what to say to pull that anger, or that drive out of me, so he just told me he wanted me to step up for my team because my team needs me. He gets in my face and gives me that criticism and that is exactly what I need to get me going.

On Janay Brinkley's stepped-up play

Coach stresses that when you come off the bench you have to make us better and I think that has finally set in. We all knew she has it in her. She is just now picking up and learning that she can do it. It is such a huge boost when you are tired and someone comes off the bench and is attacking like she was.

Junior guard Janay Brinkley

On coming off the bench

I just try to play my role, if there is an opening, I take it, and I don't force anything. If we can hit Ebony (Rowe) or Icelyn (Elie) inside, or take a three, whatever is there, you have to take it.

On the team taking over late in the game

That just comes down to practice. We always practice in a high-intensity environment. The coaches always want us to make the right reads. We just have to continue playing at that level.

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