Sun Belt-leading Blue Raiders host Florida Atlantic Thursday

Tipoff set for 7 p.m. in Murphy Center

January 9, 2013 · @MTAthletics

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee men's basketball looks to remain in first place of the Sun Belt's East Division when it takes on Florida Atlantic Thursday at 7 p.m. CT in Murphy Center.

GAME INFORMATION
Matchup: Florida Atlantic Owls (8-8, 3-2 SBC) at Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders (12-4, 4-1 SBC)
Date: Thursday, Jan. 10
Time: 7 p.m. CT
Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Facility: Murphy Center
Tickets: Available here or by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU

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

Live Video - Live Audio - Live Stats

Twitter: @MTAthletics, @MT_MBB

SERIES INFORMATION

- Overall: MT leads, 9-4 // As Sun Belt foes: MT leads, 8-4
- In Murfreesboro: MT leads, 5-2
- Under Davis: MT leads, 9-4
- First meeting: MT 90, FAU 76 (12/21/05 in Louisville, Ky.)
- First Sun Belt meeting: MT 72, FAU 68 (1/10/07 in Boca Raton)
- Last year: MT 67, FAU 54 (1/14/12 in Boca Raton) // MT 72, FAU 59 (2/18/12 in Murfreesboro)
- Current Streak: MT, 2 games

- Longest MT streak: 4 games (2005-08) // Longest FAU streak: 2 games (1/13/11-1/27/11)

BLUE RAIDER FASTBREAK POINTS

- MT is undefeated at 8-0 in home games this season, including one at Bridgestone Arena, and holds a 22-2 record at Murphy Center over the past two seasons. The Blue Raiders have won 20 straight regular-season games at Murphy Center.
- MT has won five of its last six games.
- MT has now reached the 10-win mark before the new year for two straight seasons.
- A win tonight would make MT one of 20 teams in the country 9-0 or better at home this year.
- MT currently ranks 13th nationally in 3-point field goal percentage defense (.275).
- After starting last season 4-0 and with the 5-1 start this season, MT got 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.
- The Knight brothers combined for 35 points at Arkansas State and both Tweety and Marcos had career-highs in scoring. Marcos tallied 23 points and Tweety added 12.
- 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.

SUN BELT TOURNAMENT

Tickets are now available for the Sun Belt Championship in Hot Springs, Ark. All-session booklets are $83 and fans can purchase by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU or clicking here.

SCOUTING FLORIDA ATLANTIC

- The Owls are coming off a 75-70 win over Louisiana on Thursday
- Gregg Gantt has been the leading scorer in 14 contests this season and leads the team with 22.4 points per game
- Stefan Moody is also averaging double-figure scoring with 14.0 ppg and Jordan McCoy is the leading rebounder at 5.9 rpg
- The Owls are 2-6 on the road this year
- Florida Atlantic returns five letterwinners, including two starters, from a squad that finished 11-19 overall and 7-9 in the Sun Belt last season

LAST TIME OUT

A second-half surge and a pair of late free throws from Bruce Massey sealed Middle Tennessee's 60-56 victory over South Alabama on Saturday night at Mitchell Center. Nine Blue Raiders scored in the contest, led by Massey's 12 points. Shawn Jones also cracked double-figure scoring with 11 points. Neiko Hunter chipped in nine points, while Marcos Knight and James Gallman each added six. Knight and Kerry Hammonds led the Blue Raiders on the boards with seven rebounds each.

SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP

On Jan. 5, MT women's basketball head coach Rick Insell earned his 183rd win to become the program's all-time winningest coach. Insell joined MT men's basketball head coach Kermit Davis, who set the school record on Dec. 29, 2011, as an all-time wins leader. MT is just one of four schools (Gonzaga, Sacred Heart and UALR) to have both their current men's and women's basketball coaches as all-time wins leaders.

HOME SWEET HOME

MT has continued to defend its home court this season after finishing 15-2 in Murphy Center last year. The Blue Raiders are 8-0 in home games, including a win at Bridgestone Arena, and haven't lost a regular-season game in Murphy Center since Nov. 20, 2011 when MT dropped an 87-84 double overtime decision to Belmont. That's 20 straight regular-season victories in Murphy Center for the Blue Raiders. MT is now 22-2 over the last two seasons in Murphy Center.

A win on Thursday would make MT one of 20 teams in the country 9-0 or better at home this year.

RANKINGS

MT is currently ranked 44th in the Sagarin Ratings and 44th according to the Pomeroy College Basketball Ratings. The Blue Raiders are the highest ranked Sun Belt team in both ratings. The Blue Raiders are also ranked No. 4 in the Bleacher Report's Mid-Major Top 25 and 13th in CBS' Power Pyramid.

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 has outscored its opponent in all but one game this season, currently owning a 483-224 advantage.

SWITCHING IT UP

Head coach Kermit Davis has used nine different starting lineups this year. Through the first five games, Davis used five different lineups. In all, 11 different Blue Raiders have started at least one game this year.

DEEP BENCH

All 10 Blue Raiders that saw action at Louisiana on Nov. 29 also scored in the contest. Through 15 games, seven different Blue Raiders have been the leading scorer and nine Blue Raiders have combined for 40 double-figure scoring performances.

MORE ON THE DEPTH

MT currently has 10 players averaging more than 10 minutes per game. Half of those are averaging more than 18 minutes.

DOMINATING DEFENSE

MT held North Texas to 18.5 percent shooting in the first half of the Dec. 31 contest. That is the best field goal percentage defense for the Blue Raiders since Feb. 1, 2007 when MT held Denver to 18.2 percent (4-for-22) in the second half. MT also held North Texas to five field goals in the first half, a season-low for an opponent. It was the fewest field goals for an opponent in a half since Arkansas State had five on Jan. 19, 2012 in the second half.

SUN BELT'S WINNINGEST COACH

With South Alabama's Ronnie Arrow retiring earlier this season, Kermit Davis is now the Sun Belt's

winningest active coach. He is one of only four league coaches to crack the century mark and currently ranks fourth all-time with 102 league wins, behind Arrow (112), Gene Bartow (111), and Dickey Nutt (103).

OUT-REBOUNDING OPPONENTS

The Blue Raiders have out-rebounded their opponent in 11 contests this season. MT currently owns a 601-522 rebounding advantage, an average of 37.6 compared to 32.6.

TAKING ON THE SEC

With the win over Vanderbilt on Dec. 21, MT has now beaten two SEC opponents in back-to-back seasons for the first time in program history. MT also beat Ole Miss on Dec. 8. The Blue Raiders defeated both Tennessee and Ole Miss last season.

The win over Ole Miss this year also marked the first win over an SEC opponent in Murphy Center since a 93-90 overtime victory against Vanderbilt on Feb. 1, 1995. MT is now 2-1 against the SEC this year (Lost to No. 10 Florida on Nov. 18) and has won four of the last six meetings against SEC opponents.

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONES

Shawn Jones raked in the Sun Belt and Tennessee Sports Writers Association Player of the Week awards on Nov. 27 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. 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. For the week, Jones averaged 19.5 points and 12.5 rebounds while shooting 66.7 percent from the field.

He earned his second TSWA weekly honor on Jan. 3 after averaging 11.3 points and 7.5 rebounds in leading the Blue Raiders to a 4-0 record over a two-week period. He posted a pair of double-figure scoring performances, including his third double-double of the season with 15 points and 13 rebounds against FIU. The Hialeah, Fla., native scored 13 points versus Tennessee State and registered eight points and nine boards in a victory over Vanderbilt at Bridgestone Arena in Nashville.

ESPN2 RETURNS

The Blue Raiders Jan. 26 home game against WKU has been selected by ESPN2 as the Sun Belt's Wildcard Game. Last year, the Blue Raiders played twice on ESPN2 in Murphy Center, earning a 68-60 win over UALR on Feb. 11 before falling to Minnesota, 78-72, in the quarterfinals of the National Invitation Tournament (NIT). The last time MT and WKU met on ESPN2 was Jan. 23, 2010, when former Blue Raider Desmond "Boogie" Yates scored 28 points and became the school's all-time leading scorer in an 84-74 MT victory in Bowling Green, Ky.

TEAM OF THE WEEK

Middle Tennessee was named the Mid-Major Team of the Week by ESPN.com's Myron Medcalf on Dec. 13. The Blue Raiders earned the nod after knocking off Ole Miss, 65-62.

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. The San Juan, Puerto Rico, native currently ranks fifth in the Sun Belt with a 42.7 3-point field goal percentage and leads the team with 32 3-pointers this year. Against Akron on Dec. 2, Cintron sank four 3-pointers en route to a career-high 22 points. He tied his career-high of five 3-pointers against Tennessee State on Dec. 18.

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.

BROTHERLY LOVE

The 2012-13 MT squad features two sets of brothers. Marcos Knight is the older brother of Tweety Knight, with both joining the Blue Raiders via Chipola Junior College. Zane Gibson is the older brother of Gavin Gibson, both coming to MT from Baylor School.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

Kermit Davis, a former assistant coach at Idaho, is one of four current head coaches that comprised the 1986-87 Idaho staff.
Tim Floyd - Head Coach (now HC at UTEP)

Larry Eustachy - Assistant Coach (now HC at Colorado State)

Kermit Davis - Assistant Coach (now HC at Middle Tennessee State)

Randy Bennett - Graduate Assistant (now HC at Saint Mary's)

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