Blue Raiders take Sun Belt's best record to Sunshine State

MT will play at FIU Thursday at 7:30 p.m. ET

January 30, 2013 · @MTAthletics

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee men's basketball hits the road this weekend for a pair of games in Florida, beginning at FIU on Thursday. Tipoff is slated for 7:30 p.m. ET at U.S. Century Bank Arena.

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.

GAME INFORMATION
Matchup: Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders (18-4, 10-1 SBC) at FIU Panthers (11-9, 6-5 SBC)
Date: Thursday, Jan. 31
Time: 7:30 p.m. ET
Location: Miami, Fla.
Facility: U.S. Century Bank Arena

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

Live Video - Live Audio - Live Stats

Twitter: @MTAthletics, @MT_MBB

SERIES INFORMATION

- Overall: MT leads, 22-6 // As Sun Belt foes: MT leads, 20-6
- In Miami: MT leads, 10-3

- Under coach Davis: MT leads, 19-3
- First meeting: MT 86, FIU 72 (1/7/91 in Murfreesboro)
- First Sun Belt meeting: FIU 61, MT 59 (1/11/01 in Murfreesboro)
- Last meeting: MT 69, FIU 52 (12/29/12)
- Last year at FIU: MT 70, FIU 59 (1/12/12)
- Current Streak: MT, 7 games (Dating back to 2/25/10)
- Longest MT streak: 10 games (2002-06)// Longest FIU streak: 3 games (2001-02)
- Noteworthy: MT has won seven in a row and nine of the last 10 against the Panthers.

BLUE RAIDER FASTBREAK POINTS

- Kermit Davis ranks third on the list of the Sun Belt's all-time winningest coaches with 108 wins. As the winningest active coach, Davis needs just five wins to become the conference's all-time winningest coach, surpassing Ronnie Arrow's 112.
- MT is undefeated at 12-0 in home games this season, including one at Bridgestone Arena, and holds a 26-2 record at Murphy Center over the past two seasons. The Blue Raiders have won 24 straight regular-season games at Murphy Center, which is tied for the fourth-longest streak in the country.
- MT has won seven in a row and 11 of the last 12 games.
- MT is one of seven teams in the country 12-0 or better at home this year.
- MT is tied for 12th nationally with an .804 winning percentange over the past two seasons.
- MT currently ranks 12th nationally in 3-point field goal percentage defense (.281).
- MT is one of 10 teams in the country with 18 or more wins.
- MT ranks 31st nationally in defensive efficiency with a rating of 89.1 according to Pomeroy. The Blue Raiders have held six of their last seven opponents to 60 points or less and 10 of their last 12.
- MT has now reached the 10-win mark before the new year for two straight seasons.
- With the 18-4 start this year and the 20-2 start last year, MT is off to its best back-to-back starts in 26 years. Prior to the past two seasons, MT's best starts included an 18-5 in 1985-86 record and 19-3 in 1986-87.
- 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 FIU

- FIU is coming off a 60-58 loss at South Alabama on Sunday
- Tymell Murphy leads the Panthers with 15.2 points and 7.6 rebounds per game
- Malik Smith (14.5 ppg) and Jerome Frink (10.2 ppg) are also averaging double figures
- The Panthers are 6-2 at home
- The Panthers return six letterwinners and no starters from last year's team that finished 8-21 overall and 5-11 in the Sun Belt

LAST TIME OUT

In front of a season-high crowd of 10,105 fans, Middle Tennessee used a second-half run of 14 unanswered points en route to a 72-53 win over the WKU Hilltoppers at Murphy Center on Saturday

evening. Marcos Knight had a team-high 15 points and also added five assists. Bruce Massey scored 10 points, all in the second half, and collected seven rebounds, six assists and four steals in the game. Neiko Hunter also cracked double-figure scoring with 13 points thanks in part to 7-for-11 free throw shooting. MT hit 48.1 percent from the field and limited WKU to 39 percent.

ALL THEY DO IS WIN

With 18 wins, the Blue Raiders have already clinched a winning season. MT plays 31 regular season games this year and has the potential of further games in the conference tournament and a postseason berth. This is the ninth winning season under Davis and fifth in the last six years for MT.

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 sits third with 108 league wins, behind Arrow (112) and Gene Bartow (111).

HEADED TO C-USA

MT will join Conference USA for the 2013-14 season. Next year will feature a 16-game schedule for with each school playing every team in the league once and a geographic opponent twice (no divisions). Middle Tennessee's home and away opponent will be UAB. The 2014 C-USA men's and women's basketball tournaments will take place at UTEP.

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 12-0 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 24 straight regular-season victories in Murphy Center for the Blue Raiders. MT is now 26-2 over the last two seasons in Murphy Center.

RANKINGS

MT ranks the highest in the Sun Belt in all of the following:
NCAA RPI: 36
ESPN Daily RPI: 37
ESPN BPI: 44
Pomeroy: 43
Sagarin: 55
ESPN Mid-Major Poll: 8
Bleacher Report Mid-Major: 6

EXPERIENCED SQUAD

According to Ken Pomeroy, MT is tied as the second-most experienced team in the country with an average of 2.53 years, behind only Valparaiso (2.69) and matching Savannah State. The roster

features a combined 13 juniors and seniors compared to four freshmen and sophomores.

DEEP BENCH

The Blue Raider bench accounts for 43.2 percent of the minutes, which ranks 10th nationally according Pomeroy. MT currently has nine players averaging more than 12 minutes per game. Seven of those are averaging more than 18 minutes. Nine different Blue Raiders have been the leading scorer and ten Blue Raiders have combined for 59 double-figure scoring performances.

BENCH PRODUCTION

The Blue Raider bench has outscored its opponent in all but one game this season, currently owning a 635-289 advantage, or an average of 28.9 to 13.1 points per game.

MAINTAINING THE LEAD

MT has not trailed after halftime in its last seven games. The Blue Raiders are 15-0 this season when leading at halftime.

IT'S A TOUGH ROAD

While MT has been dominant at home this year, the Blue Raiders have also battled to earn road wins. Check out the comparison between MT's home vs. road scoring:

CATEGORY	HOME	AWAY
MT PPG	75.0	65.4
Opp. PPG	54.6	62.6
Margin	+20.4	+2.9

SWITCHING IT UP

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

DOMINATING DEFENSE

Pomeroy ranks the Blue Raiders seventh in 3-point defense at 28.1 percent and 31st nationally in defensive efficiency with a rating of 89.1. 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.

INTIMIDATION FACTOR

Opponents haven't had much luck at the line against MT. The opposition is shooting 62.7 percent from the stripe, fourth-lowest in the country.

OUT-REBOUNDING OPPONENTS

The Blue Raiders have out-rebounded their opponent in 16 contests this season. MT currently owns a 815-688 rebounding advantage, an average of 37.0 compared to 31.3.

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.

WINNING BIG

MT's 82-50 win over UALR and 82-60 win over Louisiana marked the first time in 15 years the Blue Raiders beat consecutive conference opponents by at least 20 points. On Jan. 13, 1998, MT beat OVC foe Tennessee Tech, 80-60, then on Jan. 15 beat Austin Peay, 63-38.

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. The San Juan, Puerto Rico, native currently ranks fifth in the Sun Belt with a 41.0 3-point field goal percentage and leads the team with 41 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)