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Missouri Tigers basketball at Tennessee Volunteers: Prediction, TV, lineups, bet line
Missouri vs Tennessee Prediction, College Basketball Game Preview

PREDICTION

About No. 6 Tennessee (10-2, 4-2 SEC): The Vols looked dominant when they beat up the Tigers, looking like the team to beat in the SEC. Reality hasn't lived up to those expectations though. Tennessee fell victim to Alabama and was hapless in a 75-49 loss to Florida in their last game. Tennessee still has one of the best defenses in the country, led by forwards Yves Pons and John Fulkerson. KenPom ranks them No. 12.

About No. 19 Missouri (9-2, 3-2 SEC): The Tigers had a COVID-19 pause, a second-half collapse and are currently on a two-game win streak since they last faced the Vols. It's been the Jeremiah Tilmon show throughout SEC play as he's excelled and turned the corner. Tilmon's emergence has been crucial for a MU team which has seen its guard play fluctuate on who's hot and who's not. But that's the perk of having a deep, experienced team as the Tigers shuffle who's the No. 1 option on a nightly basis. KenPom has them No. 37.

Prediction: Mizzou claims it knows it can hang with Tennessee despite the 20-point loss to open SEC play. The Tigers will have a chance to prove just that against a Tennessee squad that

picked them apart last time out. Pons finished with four blocks that game and was a force on the defensive end.

That wasn't helped by Tennessee sprinting to a 23-4 lead that game. MU coach Cuonzo Martin said there could be some dead legs going into the game because of the holiday layoff. But only the Tigers got that memo as the Vols were punishing right from tipoff.

Road games aren't quite the same during a pandemic, but the Tigers can't afford to let the Vols do whatever they want. While Martin has built his program on toughness, MU didn't exhibit any of those characteristics in that loss. The Tigers have shown a willingness to punch opponents in the mouth this season and will need that juice against Tennessee.

We'll say this one isn't a blowout by any means as the Vols flash their defensive pressure. But the Tigers aren't willing to back down, and a couple three-pointers drop to make it a grind down the stretch. But Tennessee comes out with the victory, pulling away in the final minutes as MU's comeback attempt falls just short.

Why Missouri Will Win

The Missouri defense is hammering everyone who wants to shoot from the outside.

The eight threes hit by South Carolina in the Mizzou win a few days ago were the most made by anyone all year against this D. That goes along with the defense as a whole that contests everything and makes everyone scratch and claw for what they can get.

Tennessee doesn't need to shoot from three, but it's coming off a disastrous performance from the outside in the shocking 75-49 loss to Florida a few days ago. The Vols couldn't hit a thing, and Missouri's defense is good enough to keep that going, but ...

Why Tennessee Will Win

Tennessee has the ability to turn the lights out in a snap.

The offense did everything right in the 73-53 win over the Tigers back in December, and that's with only shooting seven three-pointers – and making five.

The Vols are able to handle the pressure from the Tiger defense, they don't turn the ball over, and they can play D, too. Missouri might lead the SEC in field goal defense, but no one in the conference gives up fewer points than Tennessee.

What's Going To Happen

It seems to be all about the three for Missouri, at least on the defensive side. Tennessee hit 71% of its shots from beyond the arc, and Mississippi State hit half of its threes in the win over the Tigers. But there's something bigger about that.

Yes, those are the only two teams to make more than 34% from three on Mizzou, and they're also the only two teams to shoot fewer than 13 from the outside.

Everything else worked for the Vol and Bulldog offenses in the wins, but the Missouri defense will be far, far better this time around. Tennessee will pull it off at home, but it'll be a great fight.