Blue Raiders Lose Close One to ECU 65-63

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Murfreesboro, Tenn. -- Kermit Davis' debut on the Blue Raider bench was an exciting contest, but the Blue Raiders fell 65-63 to visiting East Carolina (1-0).

The Blue Raiders (0-1) led 34-32 at the half, but managed only eight field goals in the second stanza against a tough Pirate defense. Middle Tennessee somehow clung to a lead late into the game, but a trey from ECU's Belton Rivers with 3:02 on the clock put the visitors ahead to stay.

John Humphrey's 16 points and seven rebounds paced the Blue Raiders while Tommy Gunn added 14 points and five boards. Keith Connor also added 10 points to the team's ledger.

East Carolina got 15 points and six rebounds from Gabriel Mikulas while three other Pirates netted double figures. Erroyl Bing led all rebounders with eight.

The Blue Raiders will face a daunting task in their next game, a matchup with #4 Alabama on Monday in Tuscaloosa.

FIRST STARTS: Newcomers Napoleon Rhodes, Keith Conner, and Marcus Robinson all made their first starts tonight as Blue Raiders.

STREAK STILL ALIVE: The Blue Raiders have now hit at least one three-pointer in 188 consecutive games. The last time MT failed to hit a shot from behind the arc was Jan. 20, 1996 at Morehead State.

HUMP OFF TO STRONG START: Senior John Humphrey led the Blue Raiders tonight with 16 points and a career-high seven rebounds. It was Humphrey's 11th double figure scoring game and the fourth time in his career he has paced the Blue Raiders in scoring.

GUNN SOLID: Junior Tommy Gunn tallied 14 points on 5-for-10 shooting, while also grabbing five rebounds and two steals. It was Gunn's 33rd double figure scoring game of his career.

UP NEXT: The Blue Raiders will hit the road for the first time on Monday with a game against #4 Alabama in Tuscaloosa. The Blue Raiders are 0-4 all time against the Crimson Tide. The last meeting between the two schools came on Nov. 24, 1996 with UA prevailing 77-74.

SCHEDULE NOTE: Some earlier versions of the Blue Raider schedule list the team's home game against Tennessee Tech as Dec. 3, but the actual game date is Dec. 4. A late scheduling change meant that early printings of the slate incorrectly listed the date. The MT athletic department apologizes for any inconvenience this may have caused.

TIDBITS: The Blue Raiders lost their season opener for the first time in five years ... MT shot just 33.3 percent from the field in the second half ... Keith Conner's debut saw him score 10 points and grab three rebounds ... Four of Middle Tennessee's 10 offensive rebounds were by John Humphrey.

MT Head Coach Kermit Davis:
I thought that both teams played extremely hard. We were best when we got in transition. Our guys fought through adversity when we got in foul trouble. I thought our effort was fine. Our offense has to get better. Keith Connor had a good look at the three. It just didn't go down.

It was a tough loss, but we have to regroup and take on the Tide on Monday. It will be a good challenge for our team, regardless of what happens.

MT Guard John Humphrey:
Coach [Davis] has been talking all year about not putting [the game] in the referee's hands, but it was a desperation shot.

We had a couple of mental lapses. We started off playing complacent in the second half. I think we will be okay as long as we keep playing good defense.

MT Guard Tommy Gunn:
I felt that if we could have sustained the effort, we would have come out with a win. We should be and are going to be contenders.

We played very good defense. That is our emphasis in practice. When our shots start falling in the second half, then it is going to be a ball game.

I felt the energy coming into the arena tonight. It made me step up, and it was fun. We felt a lot of energy out there.

ECU Head Coach Bill Herrion:
It is a great win for us. We are still a young team. We had good Conference USA wins at home last

year. If our program is going to make the next step, we have to win non-conference games on the road. Offensively, we struggled. But, their defense had something to do with that. [MT] is going to win ball games this year. Kermit [Davis] is a great coach. They are a good basketball team. They defend and play hard.

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