

MT Fends Off Owls 66-62

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee fought off some holiday rust on Friday night while overcoming a 10-point second half deficit to stop an upset bid from visiting Kennesaw State 66-62.

The Blue Raiders (4-7) started off sluggishly. After jumping out to a 4-0 lead, the Owls (8-3) went on a 22-5 run to take a 13-point lead with 10:42 to go in the first half. The Owls showed no signs of slowing down there, pushing the lead to as many as 14.

A jumper from Steven Jackson cut the lead back to nine at 29-20 with 3:40 left in the opening frame, but KSU responded again, running the lead back to 33-20 with 1:50 to go.

A 3-pointer from Tommy Gunn, his only shot in the first stanza, cut the lead to 35-25 as time expired in the opening period.

The Blue Raiders came back out in the second half looking to retake command of the game. The team went on 11-4 run to open the second half, cutting the lead to three at 39-36 with 15:42 remaining in the contest. Kennesaw State would press the issue again, going on a 8-0 run of its own to push the lead back to 11 points at 47-36.

The Blue Raiders finally began to execute offensively as the second half wore on. MT had cut the lead back to five at 50-45 with 8:40 left behind a John Humphrey trey.

A Brandon Moore jumper put the lead back to nine at 54-45 with 7:57 left, but it would prove to be a short-lived advantage. The Blue Raiders finally knotted the score at 54 with 4:30 remaining behind a pair of Humphrey free throws.

From that point, Tommy Gunn took over. Gunn, who missed his first start of the season after being snowbound in his hometown of Syracuse, N.Y., until late Thursday night, scored eight straight points for Middle Tennessee as the Blue Raiders finally recaptured the lead. His dunk with 1:54 left in the



game gave the Blue Raiders a 62-57 advantage that they would not relinquish.

William Pippen led the Blue Raiders in scoring and rebounding with 15 points and seven boards. Gunn finished the game with 12 points, and Napoleon Rhodes also netted 12.

Brandon Moore paced the Owls with 18 points.

The Blue Raiders will now set their sights on a New Year's Day rematch with Murray State before tipping off the conference schedule with a Jan. 4 game against Western Kentucky.

NOTES AND QUOTES

Taking Better Care of the Ball: The Blue Raiders committed an alarming 16 turnovers in the opening frame of tonight's game while only forcing five from the Owls. The second half was a reversal of fortunes as MT committed only seven miscues while forcing the Owls into eight turnovers.

Milestone Win for Davis: MT Head Coach Kermit Davis picked up the 75th Division I win of his career against Kennesaw State. Davis now owns a career DI mark of 75-56.

Lucky No. 7: Kermit Davis utilized the seventh different starting lineup of the season against Kennesaw State. Tommy Gunn missed his first start of the season tonight after being the only Blue Raider to have started in each of the team's first 10 games.

On the Boards: The Blue Raiders outrebounded the opposition for the eighth time this season with a 35-24 advantage on the glass against the Owls. The Blue Raiders are now 4-4 in games in which they rebound their opponent.

Hot Shooting: The Blue Raiders shot 53.5 percent against Kennesaw State on Thursday after turning in a smoldering 62.5 percent effort in the second stanza. The game marks the fifth time this year that the team has bucketed more than half their shots in a game, giving the team a 4-1 record when shooting 50 percent or better.

Head Coach Kermit Davis: "I got on them pretty good in the dressing room [at halftime]. The first half was about as bad an offensive execution as I have ever seen. We finally got it going in the last eight or nine minutes."

Forward William Pippen: "It was a dogfight and I'm glad we came out on top. We just didn't come out and play in the first half. They smelled blood and went after it. We had to regain our composure and take it to them in the second half."

Guard Tommy Gunn: "I had to get back into it tonight. My team got me into it in the last five minutes. I was tough not being able to be back with the team and get our chemistry going again."

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