MT Fights Off Hornets 67-62

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. - Middle Tennessee found itself in a dogfight on Thursday night, squeaking out a 67-62 win over an Alabama State team that it had soundly beaten at home just 13 days earlier. The Blue Raiders jumped out early, but fell into a drought of nearly 10 minutes without a field goal toward the end of the second half and found themselves down five with 4:05 left in the opening half. Steven Jackson kept the Blue Raiders in the thick of things with a 12-footer off the dribble to put Middle Tennessee ahead 28-27 with 2:17 to go in the half. A Ralfeal Golden layup put the Hornets back in front 29-28 with 1:55 left, but Jackson knotted the score by knocking down one of two free throws with 1:40 left to end the scoring in the opening stanza, sending each team to the locker room with 29 points. The second half was a wild affair altogether. Alabama State jumped out with an 8-1 run to open the second period, holding a seven-point advantage with 16:35 to go. But the Blue Raiders would answer with a 7-0 run of their own. Tommy Gunn drilled a trey to cut the lead to four and Kyle Young and Mike Dean added field goals to tie the score at 37 with 15:33 left. Eventually, the Blue Raiders would seem to gain a firm advantage in the game. Alabama State would cut the lead to five on two occasions, the last coming at 6:18 to play. With the Hornets trailing by only five, the lid came off the boiler for ASU head coach Rob Spivery as he argued a call and received two technical fouls and was ejected from the contest. The Blue Raiders converted two of the four free throw attempts and finally pushed the lead to 63-53 with 2:35 to go. The Hornets once again wouldn't go away. With only 18 seconds on the clock, Golden drilled a tough trey in the corner to cut the lead to three. Michael Cuffee made two free throws after the ensuing foul to put the lead back at five, but ASU's Malcolm Campbell hit a driving layup to cut the lead to 65-62 with seven seconds on the clock. Bryan Smithson iced the game for Middle Tennessee by catching a baseball-style pass under his own basket on the in-bounds play and made a difficult layup over a leaping Alexander Oliver to finish the scoring. The Blue Raiders will head back on the road Saturday with a game against nationally-ranked Cincinnati. Tip-off for the game is slated for 7 PM.

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