

Dean Leads 72-63 Blue Raider Victory

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MOBILE, Ala. - Middle

Tennessee played one of their best 20 minutes of the season in the first half, opening a double-digit lead and never looking back en route to a 72-63 victory over South Alabama Thursday night at Mitchell Center.

The Blue Raiders shot 60 percent from the field in the first half, getting balanced scoring from the entire club. Tommy Gunn led all scorers with nine at the break, while freshman Alex Weekes tallied eight in 10 minutes of action to go with a pair of assists.

Middle Tennessee held a 37-23 lead at the break but had to stave off one serious Jaguar rally in the second half.

South Alabama cut into the lead several times and got it to seven with just over six minutes remaining, but Blue Raider Mike Dean nailed a long three-pointer at 6:01 on the clock to give Middle Tennessee a 60-50 edge.

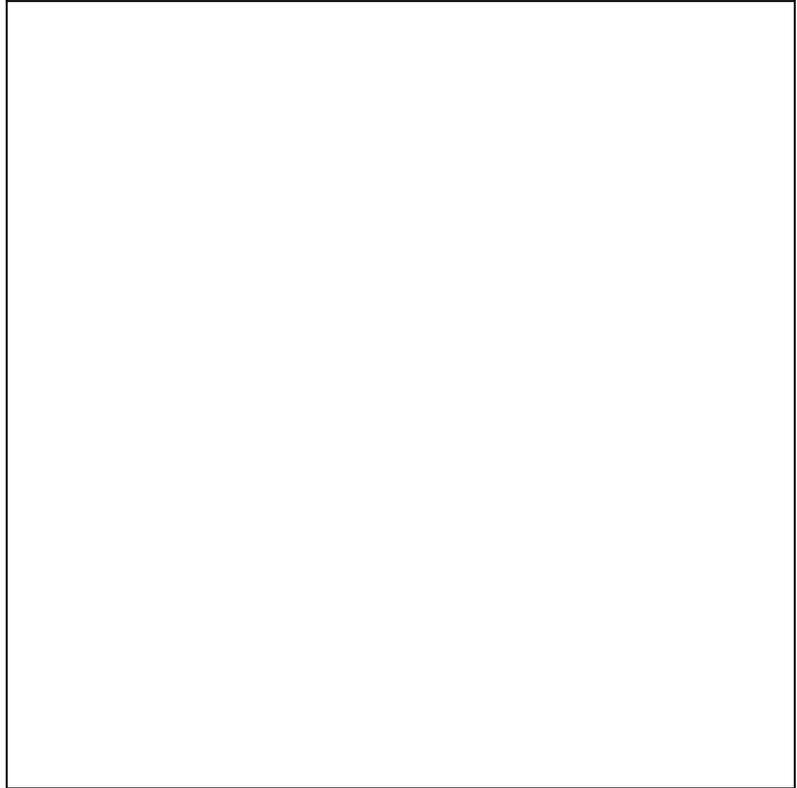
Dean went 6-for-6 from the line down the stretch to seal the win, just the second road victory of the season for the squad. The junior finished with a game-high 19 points, going 3-for-5 on three-pointers and adding four rebounds.

The Blue Raiders committed just six turnovers in the contest and only one in the second half. Middle Tennessee was also 20-of-24 from the free throw line, including 15-for-18 in the second half.

Michael Cuffee played well in 33 minutes for the Blue Raiders, adding 13 points and four boards, while Gunn had 11 and Weekes 10 in the first road conference game of the year.

Carlos Smith scored 16 for the Jaguars in the loss, 12 above his season average. Malerick Bedden netted 13 for USA while Shane Spencer had 10 off the bench. USA's leading scorer, Chris Young, was held to just eight points.

The Blue Raiders finish their two-game swing with a 7 p.m. contest Saturday against New Orleans at Lakefront Arena.



GAME NOTES

Senior Tommy Gunn moved into third place on the all-time steals list with his two thefts in the game. Gunn moved past his former coach, Gerald Harris, and now has 140 career steals ... The Blue Raiders have just 47 turnovers in the last five games, an average of just over nine per outing ... Middle Tennessee shot 60 percent in the first half, their second best of the season. The Blue Raiders shot 65 percent in the first half against South Carolina State on December 29 ... Mike Dean led all scorers with 19 points and is averaging just over 21 points per outing in Sun Belt play ... The Blue Raiders won for just the second time on the road this season and improved to 5-3 in SBC play on the road under Kermit Davis ... The win was the first in two tries at the Mitchell Center and the first in Mobile since December 3, 1980 ... The Blue Raiders have hit at least one three-pointer in 233 straight games ... Tommy Gunn played in his 100th career game and has reached double figures in 72 of those contests ... The Blue Raiders committed just six turnovers in the contest, tying the second lowest in school history, a mark set last week in the win over Arkansas State ... Middle Tennessee was 20-of-24 from the foul line in the contest and has made 69-of-90 in the three contest games, a robust 77 percent. The Blue Raiders have averaged 31.2 foul shots per contest in their last five outings, making an average of 23.4 per outing.

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