

Blue Raiders edged by Belmont in double-overtime thriller

Knight posts first career double-double

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

The Blue Raider men's basketball team overcame a 15-point first-half deficit to force double overtime against Belmont, but came up short to the Bruins, falling 87-84 on Sunday in the EA SPORTS Maui Invitational Regional title game at Murphy Center. Junior guard Marcos Knight posted his first career double-double for MT (4-1) with 17 points and 11 rebounds, while senior forward LaRon Dendy had a game-high 19 points to go along with four assists and six rebounds. Junior guard Raymond Cintron also had a career night, hitting five 3-pointers and scoring 18 points while chipping in four assists.



Junior forward JT Sulton produced his fourth double-digit scoring performance of the season with 13 points and also had a career-best four blocked shots, while junior guard Bruce Massey dished out a game-high eight assists and had a pair of steals in addition to seven points and five rebounds. For Belmont (2-2), JJ Mann matched Dendy with a game-high 19 points, while the tournament's Most Valuable Player, Kerron Johnson, scored 14. The contest was a battle throughout, featuring eight ties and 13 lead changes, and both teams missed opportunities to pull away via the free throw line, as Belmont went 9-for-18 from the charity stripe and MT was 16-for-30. The Blue Raiders rallied to tie the game at the end of regulation and then again in overtime, but were unable to mount a third rally against a Belmont team that scored 42 points in the paint and committed only 12 turnovers while scoring 23 points off 19 MT turnovers. Dendy opened the first half scoring with a 3-pointer from the top of the key to take an early 3-0 lead. He scored the first five points MT before exiting after picking up his second foul with 15:53 to go in the first period. Belmont took advantage of Dendy's absence, mounting a 14-4 run over a five-minute stretch before eventually building a 15-point advantage with 8:26 to go in the first half. Sophomore forward Shawn Jones sparked a rally when he slammed home a put-back and Cintron sank a pair of 3-pointers late in the half on a key 13-4 run to cut the Belmont lead to 35-34 at the half. Knight opened the second half for the Blue Raiders with a

mid-range jumper to give MT its first lead since holding a 5-3 advantage less than five minutes into the contest. After Belmont reclaimed the lead, Sulton's emphatic dunk off an inbounds pass put the Blue Raiders up again with 16:15 remaining. The two teams would exchange the lead over the next five minutes until the Bruins used a 14-4 run to go up by nine with 7:37 to play. The Blue Raiders trailed, 66-58, with 2:31 to go in regulation before mounting a furious rally on a 9-2 run over the next 1:41 to take a one-point lead with 50 seconds to play. Cintron drained another triple to make it 67-66, but the Bruins' Ian Clark countered with a trey of his own to re-take the lead, 69-67. Knight drew a foul on the ensuing Blue Raider possession and hit both his free throws to send the game into overtime. Knight scored the first four points of overtime to help MT take a 74-69 lead at the 3:37 mark in the extra period. Belmont countered with a 7-0 run before Dendy scored two key points in the paint to send the game to a second overtime. The Blue raiders struck first again the second overtime on a Dendy jumper, but Mann started a 9-1 run for Belmont with a 3-pointer and finished it with a pair of baskets in the paint for an 87-80 lead. Massey and Dendy added a pair of baskets to cut the deficit to three. After two Belmont misses from the free throw line, the Blue Raiders had the final shot, but junior guard James Gallman's 3-point shot from the top of the key came up short. The Blue Raiders have another quick turnaround this week, welcoming Cumberland to Murphy Center on Tuesday. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT. **Postgame Quotes**

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis

Opening statement

"That was an outstanding college basketball game to watch, to be a part of and to play in. We got down 26-11, and I thought we showed a lot of toughness to come back. We didn't panic and we ended up getting the lead, but the end result is that we left too many opportunities at the free throw line. We went 16-for-30, and that was just kind of the game. We out-rebounded them. If you can make more 3-point shots than Belmont makes in a 50-minute game, you ought to feel pretty good. And then if you also outrebound them, you should feel very good. We had 25 assists on 29 baskets made, and that is unbelievable. Belmont had 10 assists on 35 baskets made, which shows there was a ton of dribble penetration."

"All the scouting reports on point guard Kerron Johnson say that he goes left and we couldn't keep him from going left in the critical moments."

"What are the odds of two straight double-overtime games with the same team losing both games? But, like I said, it was a great game for a fan to watch, a coach to coach in and a player to play in. It was two really good teams playing. Give Belmont a lot of credit. We were up five in that first overtime, and it was just missed free throws and opportunities that cost us the game."

On making the run in the last 70 seconds to tie the game

"I think it is just the makeup of our team; we just have a lot of toughness. Marcos Knight played with four fouls for a long period of time. Making up points like that is hard to do against a team like Belmont that shoots free throws, takes care of the ball, and has really good efficiency on the offensive end. But our guys just had that look in the huddle. They were never out of it, even when it went badly. Then Raymond Cintron got going and made some big plays."

"We have got to get better at the free throw line. We had too many turnovers and we've got to get better at the line. But, really the difference was that they just made an extra play down the stretch."

On the return of Jason Jones

"It was good to have him back. He's not himself yet, but he will get himself back in shape in a

couple of weeks.”

Guard Raymond Cintron

On the biggest factor in the game

“We just couldn’t stop their point guard. He just went to the basket every time he felt like going, so we’ve got to get better on that. The rest of the game he got pretty much everything he wanted.”

“This was a big confidence boost, and I’m a pretty good shooter. The rest of the game, we got what we wanted. I’m pretty good at shooting the ball, and that is what I like to do.”

Guard Bruce Massey

On his steal at midcourt

“I just think he wasn’t paying attention. He had the ball very low. I had to gamble and happened to make the steal, so it turned out to be a good thing. If I had not gotten it, it could have gone their way. That was a big play. I think Cintron got to air one off of that steal, so it was a big play. It gave us momentum going into the next play.”

“Belmont is a really good team, and we knew that coming in. We watched film on their games against Duke and Memphis. We knew that they would come to play. They weren’t just going to come in here and give us a win at our house. When you watch Belmont, they are the same all the time, whether they are up by 20 points or down by 20 points; they are the same. It was a tough game. They have a really good team and we look forward to playing them again.”

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