Blue Raiders cruise past Cumberland, 88-48

MT off to best start in 24 years

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Senior forward LaRon Dendy scored a game-high 21 points and 11 Blue Raiders tallied points as the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team cruised past Cumberland, 88-48, on Tuesday night at Murphy Center. MT moves to 5-1 on the season, marking the best start since the 1987-88 season. Dendy finished 8-for-11 from the field and a perfect 4-for-4 from the stripe to match his career high in scoring. JT Sulton netted 14 points, marking his fifth double-figure game, while Kerry Hammonds chipped in 11 points and also had career highs in assists (5) and blocks (4). Jason Jones, in his second appearance coming off a back injury, added 10 points. Overall, 11 Blue Raiders had at least one bucket and 13 saw game action. The Blue Raiders held their opponent under 40 percent shooting for the fourth time this season (34.0%), while they cracked the 50 percent mark for the third time this year (60.7%), shooting at a 75-percent clip in the second half. MT also held a 42-8 advantage in the paint over the Bulldogs (5-2). Dendy scored back-to-back baskets for the Blue Raiders to open the game, sandwiched around a triple from Cumberland's Michael Sweat, then Sulton netted the next six points. Sweat finished with 10 points to lead the Bulldogs. MT held the Bulldogs without a field goal for a 5:42 stretch during the first half and, in the meantime, went on a 10-0 run to jump out to a 16-5 lead at the 12:35 mark. The Blue Raiders opened up a 20-point lead with 6:09 remaining before the break, using a 15-2 run over a 4:24 span for the largest lead of the half. Hammonds knocked down a 3-pointer to spark the run, and James Gallman's triple made it 31-11. Cumberland cut the deficit to 12 with an 8-0 run, using a pair of baskets from Sweat and four free throws to make it 34-22 with 2:56 left in the half. Dendy hit a 3-pointer to put the lead back to 15 and the Bulldogs responded with a bucket to close out the half trailing by 13 at 37-24. MT opened the second half with a 15-8 run, led

by Dendy's eight points during the 5:11 span. He would go on to score 14 points in the frame as the Blue Raiders widened the margin to as many as 40 late in the second half, the largest lead of the game. A 5:10 drought for the Bulldogs propelled the Blue Raiders to a 38-point lead with 7:00 minutes to go and Zane Gibson's second triple of the contest made it 79-40 at the 3:57 mark. Jimmy Oden closed out the contest with a 3-pointer for the final of 88-48. The Blue Raiders will break from action over the holiday before returning to the court on Saturday at Austin Peay. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT in Clarksville, Tenn.

POSTGAME QUOTES

Head coach Kermit Davis

Opening statement

"I thought Lonnie's (Thompson) team played really hard, and I think they are going to have a great year.

"We got a lot of guys a lot of minutes, and we've had a tough grind with six games in 11 days. Out to the west coast and back. I thought we approached the game well. We came out in the second half more determined and only gave up 34 percent shooting."

On Kerry Hammonds

"Against Belmont, Kerry had nothing but zeros across the board at halftime. Tonight we just talked to him about it. I wanted to start him again and get his head back up. He's going to be a critical player for us. I thought he came out and played with more confidence. When he rebounds the ball well, he plays well. At UCLA he played well. We want him to be more aggressive. He's athletic, and he's a really good passer off the dribble. We are encouraging him to make offensive plays in practice, to take open jump shots, and he did that tonight."

On impact player

"We keep a stat that we call impact players, and tonight Marcos Knight only had four points, but he was our impact player. When he was in the game, we went up 22, I'd take him out of the game, and we'd go down, just because of 50/50 balls, hands on balls, being in the right positions. He had four assists and four steals. There are going to be a lot of different nights for guys on our team (to be the impact player). And it was great that he got Sun Belt Player of the Week today."

On coaching teams that have come off of a hard loss)

"I've had teams that were hard to coach, but this team is not. We were really disappointed in the loss (to Belmont), but our team watched an hour and a half of tape yesterday, went 45 minutes on the floor, had great energy. Today we had as good a game-day shoot around as we've had all year. I think they were just anxious to get back on the floor."

On first 5-1 start in 24 years

"It lets me know, since there have been so many good teams here, just how hard the non-conference schedules have been here for a long time. That's the nature sometimes of our level. We all love to jump out of the gate every year, get the fan-base rolling, but sometimes at this level, you fight and fight to keep your head above water in Sun Belt play. Hats off to our team. We were greedy and we'd love to be 6-0, but if you are 5-1 and your team is playing like this, I'm sure excited about it."

Guard Kerry Hammonds

On being coached to be more aggressive

“The last two games, I might have been averaging one or two shots, so if I was open, I was going to shoot, but I wasn’t going to force anything.”

On being surrounded by offensive talent like Dendy, Sulton and Cintron
“ It’s easy to pass up a shot and pass it to those guys and let them shoot, but I’m a part of the offense, so I can shoot a little.”

Guard Zane Gibson
On getting more playing time in games like this
“The coaches prepare us so well, and I get plenty of reps in practice and in pre-game so I am ready whenever he puts me in, whether it’s in the second half with two minutes to go, or with 40 minutes to go.”

On getting into the rhythm of things
“I work on it so much, it’s not an issue. I just go out there and play as hard as I can. That’s the biggest thing. I just make sure I am playing as hard as I can, and that is all coach asks of me.

“This is my third year, and our practices are a lot different this year than the past couple of years in how hard we compete with each other. There is no way you can take off when you are in there. I think we played 13 guys tonight, and everybody that gets in there brings it because they want those minutes.”

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