

# Blue Raiders pull away from Tennessee State for third straight win

## Oden scores career-high 14 points

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**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** - Senior guard Jimmy Oden sank 10 consecutive free throws in the final two minutes and finished with a career-high 14 points as the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team pulled away from the Tennessee State Tigers for a 77-62 victory on Thursday night at Gentry Center. The Blue Raiders improve to 7-1, marking the best start since the 1986-87 campaign when MT also began the season 7-1. The Blue Raiders had contributions across the board, as four players, including Oden, scored double figures. Junior guards Marcos Knight and Jason Jones each netted 12 points, while junior guard James Gallman added 10. All 12 of Knight's points came in the second half. Junior forward JT Sulton had a solid outing as well, coming up just short of a double-double with nine points and nine rebounds. Overall, MT got 33 points from its bench compared to TSU with



just 11. The key for MT was the defense, as the Blue Raiders held the Tigers (3-5) without a field goal for an 11:33 stretch during the second half and out-rebounded TSU 38-32. The Tigers shot just 27.3 percent in the second half to finish at 32.8 percent for the game, while the Blue Raiders heated up in the second half with a 66.7 percent clip to finish at 51.1 percent for the contest. In the first half, the Blue Raiders' 3-point shooting propelled them to a 32-30 lead at the break. MT knocked down 50 percent of its treys thanks to four different Blue Raiders hitting a triple. Of the 11 first-half baskets for MT, five of them were from beyond the arc. The Blue Raiders opened the contest with the first

four points before TSU responded with a bucket and free throw to make it 4-3 early on. The Tigers took their first lead of the contest at the 14:30 mark when Patrick Miller knocked down a jumper. Miller finished the game with 14 points to lead TSU. The two teams would go on to exchange the lead four times in the first half. The Blue Raiders began to pull away at the 11:31 mark thanks to back-to-back treys from Jason Jones and junior guard Raymond Cintron, giving MT a six-point advantage. The Tigers battled back to regain the lead with 3:00 minutes before the break after Robert Covington came up with a steal then found Jordan Cyphers for a 3-pointer to make it 28-26. Covington would go on to finish the contest with 12 points and 10 rebounds. The Blue Raiders had the final possession of the half and Oden was fouled going in for a layup. He knocked down a free throw to give MT the two-point lead at the break. M.J. Rhett completed a 3-point play to open the second half and put TSU on top, 33-32. Knight responded with five straight points, his first of the game, to put the Blue Raiders back up by four with 18:22 to play. Gallman's triple made it 40-35 at the 17:33 mark, but the Tigers whittled the deficit to one on another Miller bucket with 15:33 to go. That was the last field goal TSU would hit for the next 11:33. The Tigers managed eight free throws during the stretch, but MT scored 17 points during the span to take a 10-point lead with 4:36 remaining. With MT still leading by 10 with 1:45 remaining, Oden was fouled and a technical foul was assessed to TSU's Kellen Thornton. Oden first drained the technical shots, then two more for the foul on Miller, stretching the Blue Raiders' lead to 14. He went on to hit six more in a row, scoring the final 10 points for MT in the 77-62 win. The Blue Raiders look to extend the winning streak on Sunday as the return home to host Akron. Tipoff is slated for 1 p.m. CT at Murphy Center.

### **Postgame Quotes**

#### **Head coach Kermit Davis**

*On handling the press*

"I think we're good against the press. Even our bigs are good handlers so we can spread (other teams) out a little bit. Sometimes they create some off-balance to your offense and we did. We got a little skewed in the first half, but we calmed down in the second half. I think fatigue and depth were a big factor." *On Marcos Knight's second-half performance*

"In the second half, he got back in that game. He's one of the best finishers in college basketball. He can finish it right at the rim and that's what he's got to do. We want him to shoot some shots, but early in the game he's got to get the ball to the rim and get the other team's foul total up."

#### **Senior guard Jimmy Oden**

*On how TSU has improved this year*

"They have improved. We expected to get their best. They are well-coached and have a good chemistry of players that play with a lot of energy." *On finding a way to win despite offensive struggles*

"That's what coach preaches all the time. We may not hit a lot of 3-pointers, but we have to find ways to win the game."

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