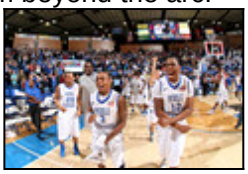
Blue Raiders knock off Belmont in wild finish

Fastest MT has reached 10 wins in 21 years

December 13, 2011 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's late rally and a pair of blocked shots proved to be the difference in a wild finish as the Blue Raider men's basketball team knocked off the Belmont Bruins, 65-62, on Tuesday night at Murphy Center in front of 6,095 fans. Senior forward LaRon Dendy was one rebound shy of a double-double, scoring 20 points and grabbing nine boards. It marked MT's first victory over Belmont (6-3) since 2007 and gave the Blue Raiders their fourth-straight home win. MT is now 10-2 on the season, marking the fastest the Blue Raiders have reached 10 wins since 1990-91. Dendy also chipped in four assists and two blocks, one of which came on a 3-point attempt from Belmont's J.J. Mann with only eight seconds remaining and the Blue Raiders leading 64-62. Junior guard Marcos Knight also came up with one of the late stops, as his career-high third block of the contest on Ian Clark's attempted trey with 22 seconds remaining preserved MT's lead. Knight finished with 10 points and eight rebounds, in addition to three assists and three steals, with his final swipe coming in the last second to end any chance of the Bruins heaving up a desperation 3-pointer. The Blue Raiders finished with a season-high nine blocks. Junior forward JT Sulton also netted double-figures in the contest with 13 points. Sulton's jumper with 2:20 remaining tied the game at 61 and his layup with 1:34 to play gave MT its first lead since the 10:42 mark of the second half. Belmont's Drew Hanlen led a trio of Bruins in double-figures, scoring 16 points, including a 4-of-8 performance from beyond the arc. Kerron Johnson netted 15 points and Clark added 11. MT won the battle of the boards with a 34-26 advantage and turned 11 offensive rebounds into 14 second-chance points. The Blue Raiders also

dominated in the paint, 34-18, and finished the contest shooting 50 percent. Belmont shot 44.7 percent for the game and 44 percent from beyond the arc.



Order holiday gifts for the home or office!

After Belmont scored the opening basket, MT went on a 7-0 run, sparked by Raymond Cintron's triple to open the game. Massey followed with a driving layup then Knight found Sulton on the fastbreak for the open dunk to make it 7-2 at the 17:17 mark in the first half. The Blue Raiders maintained the lead until the 12:35 mark when Scott Saunders' layup tied the game at 15, but James Gallman's 3-pointer from the corner 16 seconds later put MT back on top. The triple started a 14-3 run, as the Blue Raiders held the Bruins without a field goal over an 8:15 and stretched the lead to as many as 11. MT's posts combined for eight consecutive points during the stretch, with Dendy, Jones and Jacquez Rozier all getting in on the action. Hanlen knocked down a trey to pull the Bruins back within eight before Jones and Dendy sank back-to-back buckets to give the Blue Raiders their biggest lead of the half at 12 with 1:55 remaining in the frame. Free throws kept Belmont within reach at the break, as the Bruins managed just two field goals in the final 12:34 but drained five freebies during the span. The Blue Raiders took a 34-25 lead into halftime and came out with back-to-back baskets in the second stanza for the 13-point advantage, the largest of the game. The Bruins answered with a pair of free throws from Saunders and a Hanlen 3-pointer to work the deficit back down to eight with 18:04 remaining. After a free throw and layup made it a 13-point lead for MT again, Belmont quickly cut it back down to seven thanks to two more Hanlen treys. The lead dwindled to five on Saunders' baseline jumper with 14:17 to play as the Bruins capitalized on an 11-3 run. Belmont continued to chip away at the lead, pulling within one at the 10:42 mark on Brandon Baker's layup, then taking the lead for first time since the opening basket when Johnson drove in for a layup to make it 50-49. Sulton sank a free throw to knot it again at 50 with 9:11 to play, but Clark's triple and an MT turnover gave Belmont a four-point lead. The Bruins continued to knock down 3-pointers to build the lead to as many as five, finishing the contest 11-for-25 from beyond the arc, including a 7-for-12 performance in the second half. Trailing by four with 3:27 to go, Massey bounced in a layup and Sulton hit a jumper from the stripe to knot the game at 61. After Johnson hit one of two free throws, Dendy's sharp pass to Sulton under the basket for a layup put MT back on top by one with 1:34 left in the contest. At the opposite end, Knight came up with a steal on the baseline and Dendy made a free throw to give MT a 64-62 lead with 40 seconds remaining. On Belmont's next possession, it was Knight with the defensive stop again, blocking Clark's 3-point attempt and coming up with the rebound. Knight was immediately fouled, but unable to convert either

free throw and the Bruins controlled the ball with 18 seconds to go. Coming out of a timeout, the Bruins ran 10 seconds off the clock before Mann attempted a triple, but this time it was Dendy with the block and Massey who came out of the frenzy with the rebound. Massey sank the second of two free throws, giving the Bruins the ball with two seconds remaining. Belmont tried to heave the ball up the court, but Knight stepped in and cut off the pass to seal the three-point win. The Blue Raiders will break from action for a week before returning the hardwood on Dec. 21. MT will meet Ole Miss in Southaven, Miss., at 8 p.m. CT and the game will air on CSS. **Postgame Quotes**

COACH KERMIT DAVIS: "It is sure nice to win one of those close ones. Belmont will test the mettle of your team. We played so well for a long period of time, and got off to a good start in the second half. It seemed like when we missed some free throws in the second half, we bogged down a little bit, and lost momentum. We knew Belmont was going to make a run, and they did. What I was most proud of was how we responded when we got down five or six against that kind of team with all the momentum. "And I thought a huge factor in the game was our crowd. It was one of the biggest factors in us winning the game, without question. That crowd was terrific, absolutely electric in the last three minutes. In games like that, you are really proud for your players and your fan base. "At our level, you have got to cash in on opportunities like this, with the kind of start that we've had, and a quality opponent like Belmont, and an atmosphere like we had tonight, it was a perfect scenario for the Raiders today." *On free throws there at the end*

"We shoot 16-for-30 again. We are 32-60 against them at the line. Marcos Knight, one of the toughest players I have ever coached, he missed three even though he felt good about them. LaRon had his struggles, but he steps up and makes some timely free throws. He has spent time and time again (on his FT shooting), it was just one of those things. We've got to keep working at it." *On blocked shots*

We are an athletic team, we're long around the rim, but the last two plays, to block perimeter shots, those were unbelievable competitive athletic plays because the way Belmont shot it tonight (11 treys), you just felt if they got a good clean look, they were going to make it. *On Sulton playing more physically at the end of the game*

"JT had struggled and we had sat him on the bench, and we just challenged him, 'JT, we've got to have you, you've got to be making some physical plays', and he did. He made two or three great baskets down the stretch, and it was different guys making plays, too. "Belmont really guarded us well in the second half. They were really, really physical. We started pounding the ball too much, there wasn't as much ball movement. The first half was just the opposite. We had great ball movement, Belmont's was not so good. In that stretch when they played so good, the ball just went from side to side to side for baskets. Our guys did a great job of kinda correcting it, and just made tough plays at the end." *On the possibility of having a special season*

"We talked about it in the locker room. We have a ton of respect for Belmont, we know we have a ton of basketball left to play, Belmont's got a lot of basketball left We'll enjoy tonight, and maybe a little longer, since it's a while before we play (Dec. 21st at Ole Miss) again. We understand what's ahead of us. Ten wins in the non-conference is a great feat, we are off to a great start, and gives us a chance to have a terrific year." *On Belmont's three-point shooting to take the lead in the 2nd half*

"Well, they just had us on our heels. We didn't follow some of the game plan. We didn't switch men when we were supposed to, we just kind of lost our focus, but at the end of the day, we just got in a defensive stance, got square to the rim, and just tried to make competitive plays on the defensive end. It was nothing tricky about it at all. "Shawn Jones gave us a big lift tonight. He rebounded the ball well, and our bench was good tonight at times. In the second half, we didn't get the ball to the post as much as we should have. "We missed Kerry Hammonds and Jason Jones. Kerry was leading the league in 3-pt field goals, and Jason is our all-league player. For us to beat a team like

Belmont without two guys like that, it is a tribute to the depth of our team, and the character of our guys." **BRUCE MASSEY**

On last two free throws

"I was thinking 'No pressure,' just like practice, and I knew I had to hit one out of two to make it a three-point game, and that's what I did. We'll get two out of two next time, though." **JT SULTON**

"In games like this, you can't take plays off. When their team got up, we just got together, and let that be behind us, and came together and stepped our game up."

LARON DENDY

On the crowd

"Those fans mean so much. We'd love to have a crowd like that every night. We got down, and I saw a couple of players put their head down, and the crowd got us back up. Them yelling "defense, defense," got us back in it, and that helped us win the game."

DENDY

"I can make free throws, but I was struggling tonight. Missing free throws in a game this big is like losing chances. They were hitting 3-pointers big-time. They hit 11 this game. It was hurting us because we lost the lead by missing free throws. That's one thing we are going to have to really work on." **MASSEY**

On team being so unselfish passing the ball

"No one gets jealous of whoever scores the most points, different players lead the scoring on different nights. Whoever is hot, I continue to go to them as the point guard. I stay with him until he cools off, then I go to the next hot man. Since everybody is so unselfish, it works out great."

Printed on March 10, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/57308