Blue Raiders upend Ole Miss for Davis' record-tying victory

MT head coach matches Jimmy Earle for program wins record

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SOUTHAVEN, Miss. - The Blue Raider men's basketball team surged in the second half to battle past Ole Miss with a 68-56 victory on Wednesday night at the DeSoto Civic Center, as head coach Kermit Davis earned his 164th Middle Tennessee win to match Jimmy Earle as the winningest coach in program history. Junior guard Raymond Cintron matched his career-high with 18 points, while three other Blue Raiders also scored double-figures. MT improves to 11-2 on the season, while Ole Miss falls to 9-3. The Blue Raiders have now won three in a row and seven of their last eight. MT's depth was key in the victory, as 11 different Blue Raiders saw action in the contest and 10 of them tallied at least one point. After a tough first half, senior forward LaRon Dendy found rhythm in the second half to finish the game with 13 points, 12 of them coming in the latter frame. Junior guard Marcos Knight tallied 11 points and junior forward JT Sulton added 10. Junior guard Bruce Massey produced a game-high six assists, while Cintron had three assists and three steals. MT's defense stymied any Rebel from reach double-figures, as Jarvis Summers led the way with nine. Murphy Holloway collected a game-high 11 rebounds to give Ole Miss a slight edge on the boards in the contest, 33-32. The Blue Raiders, however, owned a 20-11 advantage on the boards in the second half. The second half continued to be MT's offensive strength as it has been all season, as the Blue Raiders shot 53.8 percent in the second stanza to finish the game hitting 45.3 percent from the field. MT held

the Rebels to 40 percent shooting and Ole Miss managed only eight field goals in the second half while shooting 34.8 percent in the frame. The Blue Raiders also capitalized on 21 Rebel turnovers, turning them into 24 points while Ole Miss managed just 12 points off 14 MT turnovers. MT opened the game with a triple from Cintron and jumper from Knight to take a 4-0 lead early. Terrance Henry got Ole Miss on the board at the 17:28 mark and proceeded to score the first five points for the Rebels, but would only score three more points after that. Cintron knocked down his second triple of the contest with 15:33 to play in the first half to give MT a 9-4 lead. The Blue Raiders built their lead to as many as nine thanks to a 7-1 run. Massey sparked the run with a layup and Jimmy Oden's driving hookshot, followed by a James Gallman free throw, capped the stretch to give MT an 18-9 advantage, the largest of the half, with 8:55 to go in the early frame. The Rebels rallied back with a 9-0 run, as Holloway's reverse layup tied the contest at 18 with 4:40 remaining, but Shawn Jones put MT back on top with a layup at the opposite end. Holloway's jumper gave the Rebels their first lead of the game at 22-20 with 3:23 to go in the first half. The two teams continued to trade baskets in the final minutes. Cintron hit a trey to tie the game for the third time with 1:15 left before the break, but a bucket and free throw for Ole Miss made it 27-24 with 34 seconds remaining. Jacquez Rozier pulled the Blue Raiders within one at halftime after layup seven seconds before the first frame came to a close. Dendy took control coming out of the break, putting MT back on top, 28-27, after Massey found him on a lob to open the half. He scored six of the first eight points for the Blue Raiders in the frame. After Ole Miss tied it for the fourth time with 18:17 to play, the Blue Raiders went on a 7-0 run thanks in part to Dendy's three free throws during the stretch. The Rebels worked MT's lead back to one with 12:48 left in the game and finally regained the lead for the first time since the break when Reginald Buckner tipped a missed free throw back in the basket to give ole Miss the 41-40 advantage with 11:18 remaining. The two teams knotted things up for the fifth time at 43 at the 9:42 mark, and that's when the Blue Raiders hit their stride. MT went on a 13-1 run to take the lead for good thanks to the combination of Sulton and Cintron. Sulton scored six points during the stretch, including a pair of dunks, while Cintron knocked down another triple and four free throws to make it 56-44 with 5:34 to go. The Rebels worked the deficit back to 10 twice, but it was as close as they would get the rest of the way. MT stretched the lead to as many as 16 after Dendy hit his only triple of the contest and Massey sank a free throw for the 66-50 advantage at the 1:47 mark before going on to the 12-point victory. The Blue Raiders will take an eight-day hiatus from game-action before returning home to open Sun Belt play on Dec. 29. MT will host FIU at Murphy Center at 7 p.m. CT.

Postgame Quotes

Head coach Kermit Davis

On tonight's win

"I grew up in Mississippi, so it was great for JT and I to get back home and see family and friends, but it was all about the Blue Raiders tonight. I'm so proud of players against a really good SEC team. We absorbed tons of foul trouble and injuries and different things to pull away and we ran a great offense down the stretch." *On playing through foul trouble*

"We got off to such a good start. I thought we moved the ball well and we were guarding well. Then Cintron, Knight and Dendy got two fouls. We were just mixing and matching them. Down one at halftime I told our guys, 'That's good. You held on. We weathered everything.' We were very positive and I thought the second half was a really good physical performance against a long, athletic team."

On the importance of the win

"From a national perspective, the UCLA gave us credibility and created a nice buzz around a team. We have a long way to go and a lot of basketball ahead of us. But we beat a good team that's going to win a lot of games in the SEC." **Junior forward JT Sulton**

On his excitement level

"(My excitement) is off the charts. I can't explain it. Two teams came out here and battled it out tonight." *On knowing what to expect from Ole Miss*

"We've got good coaches that do a good job on scouting reports. We carried out our scouting report tonight. They told us how physical this game was going to be and we had to step it up in practice."

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