Blue Raiders blow past South Alabama, 68-52

Dendy posts second-straight double-double

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. – Senior forward LaRon Dendy produced his fourth double-double of the season, matching his career-high with 21 points and grabbing 11 rebounds, as the Blue Raider men's basketball team rolled to a 68-52 victory over South Alabama on Saturday afternoon at Murphy Center. Middle Tennessee won its fifth straight contest to improve to 13-2 overall and 2-0 in Sun Belt action. Dendy has now had a double-double in back-to-back games, becoming the first Blue Raider since Steve Thomas in 2005 to accomplish the feat. Junior guard Marcos Knight added 17 points, one shy of his career-high, and junior guard Raymond Cintron posted his third consecutive double-figure game with 11 points. For South Alabama (8-4, 0-1 SBC), Augustine Rubit led the way with 13 points and 13 rebounds. Although MT has typically shot better in the second half throughout the season, it was the early frame that proved to be the difference in Saturday's contest. The Blue Raiders shot 55.6 percent in the first half and finished the game shooting a 45.9 percent clip, while holding the Jaguars to 24.2 percent in the first stanza and 30.3 percent overall. After Rubit scored the initial basket, the Blue Raiders induced back-to-back turnovers and translated them to points at the other end, with JT Sulton cashing in on a layup and Cintron knocking down a trey for the 5-2 advantage. Freddie Goldstein's 3-pointer tied the game at 5-5 before MT went on an 8-0 run, sparked by Dendy's back-to-back jumpers. Knight knocked down a pair of 12-footers to cap

the run and give the Blue Raiders a 13-5 lead with 14:27 to go in the first half. Knight made it six straight points with a reverse layup and the Blue Raiders continued to pull away in the early going, mounting a 22-12 lead at the 11:48 mark in the first stanza. The Blue Raiders continued to build their lead, using a 14-3 run to stretch the advantage to as many as 26 in the half, with Dendy delivering eight straight points midway through the frame. The 6-9 forward scored his 18th point of the half after a Bruce Massey steal and flip from James Gallman with one second left on the clock. In addition to Dendy's 18 points, Knight had 10 at the break, as the duo alone combined to outscore the Jaguars, 28-20, in the frame. MT took a 46-20 lead into the break on the back of a stingy defense that held the Jaguars to just eight field goals in the early frame. The Blue Raiders forced 10 first-half turnovers and converted them to 10 points, while not giving up any points off turnovers. MT would go on to finish the game with 17 points off turnovers compare to South Alabama's six. The Blue Raiders went on an 8-2 run over the first 5:08 to open the second stanza. Dendy immediately picked up where he left off, opening the frame with a reverse layup before Cintron and Gallman sank back-to-back 3-pointers for the 32-point advantage, the largest of the game. South Alabama inched back with seven unanswered points from Rubit to cut the deficit to 25 with 14:13 to play. The Jaguars continued to chip away at the margin, working it down to 22 with 7:07 remaining, but the Blue Raiders widened it back to 24 when Massey poked the ball away from Rubit and threw ahead to Dendy, who found Knight open underneath the basket for the layup. The two teams traded baskets on their next two possessions, with Shawn Jones scoring back-to-back buckets to maintain the Blue Raiders' wide margin. A pair of 3-pointers from Xavier Roberson and Goldstein trimmed MT's lead to 18 with 2:51 to go. The Jaguars eventually worked the deficit to 16 before time expired for the Blue Raider victory. MT continues Sun Belt action with its first league road game on Thursday at Troy. The Blue Raiders and Trojans will square off at 7:30 p.m. CT. **Postgame Quotes**

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis

Opening statement …

"I think as a coach you have to focus on the positives from this game. I can think of many positives from the game, but for the first 20-25 minutes, we played as well as any team that I have coached here. We played well defensively, got ball pressure and moved the ball well. LaRon Dendy was outstanding and Marcos Knight was great in the first half. I thought Bruce Massey set the tone with how he guarded the ball. In the second half, we did not guard that poorly; we just lost our way offensively. JT Sulton had many chances around the rim that he did not convert. It was a good win and a good way for us to start as we are now 2-0 in the league."

On whether LaRon Dendy was affected by South Alabama forward and Sun Belt Preseason Player of the Year Augustine Rubit …

"LaRon knows who the Sun Belt Preseason Player of the Year is and there is no question about that. We did not talk about it, but he definitely knows. LaRon was focused today. Augustine Rubit is a very good player, but LaRon made shots, he was great defensively and led the fast break for us at times. He is a very versatile guy and I was very proud of him today."

On the team's play to end 2011 …

"It is a great way to end the year. It is nice to be 13-2 and 2-0 in the Sun Belt. We had probably the best half of the season today and we have had many good halves this year, so that is encouraging. In the second half, it was good to give Torin Walker and some other guys some playing time."

Forward LaRon Dendy

On the team's performance …

"I know that he is the Sun Belt preseason player of the year, so I wanted to come out and show that

I could play as well. He is a great player, a great offensive rebounder and just a great player all around."

On the team's energy to start the game …
"We knew we needed to come out and make a statement to show the Sun Belt that we are a team that can win the league."

Forward JT Sulton
On the team's success to start the year …
"We knew we had a good team this year, we just had to show people that we were a good team. In addition to going on the trip to Canada during the summer, we have been playing lots of pick-up basketball with each other, which has helped us get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses. We are just trying to get better as a team."

On the team's dunking …
"Last year, we had many smaller guards that would not attack the rim as much. This year, we have Marcos Knight, LaRon Dendy, Shawn Jones and Jacquez Rozier – all guys that love to dunk. We have more guys on this team that like to attack the rim and put on a show. We know some fans come to watch us dunk and see us win, so that is what we try to give them."

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