

Strong second half gives Blue Raiders 67-54 win over Florida Atlantic

MT wins ninth-straight, improves to 6-0 in Sun Belt

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BOCA RATON, Fla. - A second-half surge propelled the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team to a 67-54 victory over Florida Atlantic on Saturday night at FAU Arena. With their ninth consecutive victory, the Blue Raiders are 17-2 overall, have won 13 of their last 14 contests and remain undefeated in the Sun Belt at 6-0. MT's nine-game streak is the longest in 25 years and the 6-0 league start is the best in 19 seasons. A trio of Blue Raiders scored double figures, paced by JT Sulton's 14 points. Marcos Knight added 12 points, 10 of which came in the second half. Knight's second-half performance was one of the key components of MT's 64 percent shooting in the second stanza, as the Blue Raiders shot 52.9 percent for the game. In addition to Sulton and Knight, LaRon Dendy scored 11 points, including a 7-of-8 performance from the stripe. Dendy also grabbed seven rebounds, one shy of



Sulton's team-high eight, and had a pair of blocked shots. Bruce Massey was a key contributor as well, collecting a game-high five assists and chipping in six points. The Blue Raider defense held the Owls (6-12, 2-3 SBC) to 31.1 percent shooting as Shavar Richardson and Greg Gantt were the only double-figure scorers with 10 points each. A 24-of-35 performance at the line kept FAU in the contest. Turnovers told the story early, as the two teams combined for 19 first-half turnovers. It was a back-and-forth contest throughout the first stanza, featuring five ties. With the Blue Raiders trailing

by two at the 13:16 mark, Massey's 12-foot jumper tied the game at 8-8 before Richardson's pull-up jumper put FAU back on top. Shawn Jones immediately answered with a baseline jumper to knot things at 10 and the two teams would remain tied for the next three minutes. After both sides traded free throws, it was Sulton's emphatic dunk that broke up a four-minute field-goal drought for the two teams and gave MT a permanent lead. Dendy gave the Blue Raiders a four-point advantage on a lay-in after two quick passes up the court from Sulton and Massey. Sulton gave MT a 17-11 lead with another slam at the 6:41 mark, but three minutes later the Owls inched within two after knocking down three free throws. That was as close as FAU would get the rest of the way, as James Gallman answered with a critical three-point play. Gallman was hacked on his way up for a layup and after finishing the basket, he converted the free throw for the 24-19 advantage. Gallman finished the contest with seven points. Sulton scored the next four points to close out the half with MT leading, 28-23. The Blue Raiders took control in the second stanza, opening up a 10-point advantage six minutes into the frame when Raymond Cintron hit a triple from the corner. It sparked a 13-1 run for MT and gave the Blue Raiders their biggest lead of the game at 19 with 9:38 remaining. Five different Blue Raiders got in on the action during the run, with Knight and Kerry Hammonds each converting two key steals into buckets at the opposite end. The Owls never got closer than 15 until the final 28 seconds as MT went on to the 67-54 victory. The Blue Raiders return home for a matchup against Arkansas State on Thursday. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT at Murphy Center and the contest will air on ESPN3. **Postgame Quotes**

Head coach Kermit Davis*Opening statement*

"The second half was tremendous. I thought throughout the game we guarded and carried out the game plan unbelievably. Bruce Massey did a great job getting the defense started at the point position and Marcos Knight held (Greg) Gantt to 3-for-16 and made him work for everything. Kerry Hammonds did a great job on Gantt also. It was a really good team effort. We rebounded the ball and got back to good offense shooting about 53 percent." *On Marcos Knight's performance*

"He was fabulous tonight. I thought he impacted the game. He made mid-range jump-shots and his physical approach to the game was very good." **Junior guard Marcos Knight**

On the defensive battle

"Coach talked to us before the game about toughness. We knew that FAU is a tough team to beat on the road and that we needed to come out with a lot of confidence on the defensive end. We knew we had to come in here, play tough defense and rebound the basketball. We did that to get the W."

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