Blue Raiders break 37-year-old record with win at South Alabama

MT's 19-2 start is best in program history

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MOBILE, Ala. - The Blue Raider men's basketball team made history on Saturday night with a 68-47 win over South Alabama. Middle Tennessee collected its 11th-straight victory to improve to 19-2 on the season, marking the best start in program history. The Blue Raiders remain the Sun Belt's only undefeated team at 8-0, tying the second-best league start in school history. MT's 19-2 mark tops the 37-year-old record of 18-2, set in 1974-75. The 8-0 league start is the best since the Blue Raiders also started 8-0 as a member of the Ohio Valley Conference in 1985-86 and the 11-game winning streak is the fourth-best mark in the school annals. JT Sulton and LaRon Dendy each tallied 14 points to lead the Blue Raiders, while Jason Jones chipped in 11. Dendy finished 6-of-7 from the floor, with 12 of his points coming in the second half. Marcos Knight added seven points and a season-high seven assists. Bruce Massey also delivered a solid performance, with eight points, four assists and three steals as MT finished the contest hitting 49.1 percent of their shots. MT's defense was the real story, though, as the Blue Raiders held the Jaguars (10-8, 2-5 SBC) to 20.6 percent shooting in the first half and 26.3 percent for the game. The Blue Raiders held the league's preseason player of the year, Augustine Rubit, to just eight points, with four of those coming on free throws. Mychal Ammons paced the Jaguars with 13 points. The Blue Raiders opened the contest with six straight points,

holding the Jaguars without a field goal for the first 4:31 of the game. USA responded with a 7-0 spurt, capped by a three-point play from Dallas Jones. Sulton's tip-in put a stop to the Jaguars' run and gave MT a one-point advantage, but another three-point play, this time for Javier Carter, seesawed USA to a 9-8 advantage. The two teams traded baskets before James Gallman hit a triple to give the Blue Raiders a 15-11 lead with 8:52 to go in the half. The Jaguars battled back with six straight points to regain the lead at 17-15, but Sulton countered with five consecutive points and Raymond Cintron added a trey to give MT its largest lead of the half at 23-17 with 4:43 remaining in the first stanza. The Jaguars pulled within two after Rubit knocked down a pair of free throws, but that was as close as they would get the rest of the way. The Blue Raiders hit three free throws down the stretch and Torin Walker hit his second basket of the game to stretch MT's advantage back to six at 28-22 heading into halftime. Walker finished the contest with four points. Dendy, who sat out the majority of the first half after picking up two quick fouls, stripped Ammons and handed off to Knight for the lay-in to open the second stanza and kick-start a 15-3 run for MT. On the next possession, it was Knight who found Massey streaking along the baseline for a driving layup to stretch MT's advantage to 10 within the first two minutes of the frame. The Blue Raiders continued to turn up the offensive heat, as Knight sank a 3-pointer then hit Dendy for a resounding dunk to make it 37-23. Sulton and Massey sandwiched four points apiece around a Dendy layup as MT built the lead to as many as 20 during the stretch. Dendy's eight straight points late in the second frame gave MT a 21-point advantage and Jason Jones added three more points to give the Blue Raiders a 24-point lead, the largest of the contest, with just 1:05 to play. MT looks to extend its winning streak to 12 games when the Blue Raiders return home to host Troy Thursday. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT from Murphy Center and the game will air on ESPN3 with Chip Walters and Kyle Turnham on the call. **Postgame Quotes**

MT head coach Kermit Davis

On the difference in the two halves

"We got in so much foul trouble in the first half. We guard for 40 minutes and giving up 26 percent for the game is outstanding. In the second half, we really got back to moving the ball. We had 21 assists on 28 baskets. Really big-time unselfish play tonight." *On USA's offensive rebounding*

"We have to address that on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday next week. And we've got to. The second half was a little better. All we talked about the last two days was rebounding. We've got to get it into our practices even more." *On cutting down USA's offensive rebounds in the second half*

"LaRon Dendy played with a lot more physicalness (in the second half). He got those two quick fouls and we saved him for the second half, and I thought he was really good in the second half. JT Sulton just seems to keep getting better." *On Bruce Massey's defense against Freddie Goldstein*

"Bruce Massey, if he doesn't get the defensive player of the year in our league. He is something. He's like our most valuable player just because he starts everything. He handles the ball well for us. Just another game where he did an outstanding job on the other team's really good player." **Junior forward JT Sulton**

On the historic win

"We're very proud. It was a tough win tonight. I always wanted to be a part of history and we did that tonight. We talked about (making history), but we didn't want to base our game around that. We just talked about it, did our scout and came out here and played…and we got it." *On USA's offensive rebounding the first half*

"We did a lot of talking about it (at halftime). We did a lot of scouting for it this week and we put a lot of emphasis on rebounding. We did a better job in the second half."

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