Blue Raiders earn 12th-straight, crack 20-win mark in victory over Troy

MT 9-0 in SBC, matches best league start in history

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Raymond Cintron and LaRon Dendy scored 17 points apiece to lead the Blue Raider men's basketball team to its 12th-straight win with a 71-58 victory over Troy on Thursday night at Murphy Center, completing the season-sweep of the Trojans. MT sits at 20-2, marking the first 20-win season in 21 years, while the 9-0 Sun Belt start matches the best league mark in program history set in 1974-75. Cintron finished 6-of-9 from the field, including a 5-of-7 performance from 3-point land. Dendy was also 6-of-9 and went 5-for-7 at the line while grabbing seven rebounds. MT finished the contest with 23 assists on 26 baskets, with a game-high seven helps coming from Bruce Massey. James Gallman collected four assists, while Marcos Knight and Kerry Hammonds each delivered three. Although Will Weathers tallied a game-high 22 points to lead the Trojans (7-12, 2-6 SBC) and Justin Wright added 13, Troy got just seven points from the bench compared to MT's 21. The Trojans finished the game shooting 46 percent, but shot just 27.8 percent from 3-point range and had 19 turnovers in the contest. The Blue Raiders got off to a hot start, hitting four of their first six shots, but Troy matched them early in the back-and-forth contest that featured eight lead changes in the first frame. Cintron hit a three and JT Sulton added a free throw two minutes into the game to give MT an 8-5 advantage. The Blue Raiders maintained a lead until the 12:27 mark when Wright sank a triple to put the Trojans up, 14-12. Sulton's pair of free throws tied the game, but Raymond Chambers and Weathers sandwiched jumpers around another Cintron trey to put Troy back on top by one. Dendy seesawed MT back to a 19-18 lead with a lay-in from the front iron and Cintron's third 3-pointer of the half stretched the lead to four with 7:19 to go in the early stanza. It sparked a 12-2 run for the Blue Raiders, with Cintron adding his fourth trey during the stretch to give MT a 29-20 lead with five

minutes remaining in the half. The Blue Raiders continued to build the lead, upping it to 13 on Kerr Hammonds' 3-pointer before finishing the half leading, 39-30. MT finished the frame shooting 50 percent, including 5-for-10 from beyond the arc, paced by Cintron's 14 points on 4-of-5 3-point shooting. A three-point play from Dendy opened the second stanza for MT and Knight stretched the lead back to double-figures with a reverse layup. Cintron knocked down his fifth triple to give the Blue Raiders a 14-point lead as MT began the second half on a 10-5 run. Troy cut the deficit back to single digits with a 7-2 spurt, including five straight points coming from Wright. Massey halted the run with a baseline jumper and kick-started an 11-2 run for the Blue Raiders in response. Shawn Jones tallied six consecutive points to cap the stretch and give MT its biggest lead of the game at 18 with just under eight minutes to go. The Trojans pulled within 11 three times down the stretch, but Dendy's pair of layups and a jam from Hammonds kept Troy at bay as the Blue Raiders cruised to the 13-point victory. The Blue Raiders also raised $1,750 as part of Coaches vs. Cancer Suits and Sneakers Awareness Weekend. MT now turns its attention to in-state foe Vanderbilt. The Blue Raiders and Commodores will square off at 1 p.m. CT on Saturday at Memorial Gym in Nashville, Tenn. **Postgame Quotes**

COACH KERMIT DAVIS: "Troy has competed really well both times they have played us. Don (Maestri) did an excellent job in getting his team ready to play. We weren't at our best. We had four or five guys who didn't play their best, but we found a way to win a league game.

"We were up 16 or 17, comfortable, and I thought our bench did a great job getting the lead out to 16, but when we put those guys back in, they didn't have the same juice. But it was another double-figure win in the league, which is always difficult to do.

"Congratulations to our players for 20 wins in January, and that's always hard to do. Twenty wins is sort of a bench-mark, and we'd talked about it, and we have a lot more goals that we are trying to accomplish. But to win 20 before the end of January, that's really difficult to do, and I am proud of our players and excited for our fans. They were terrific again tonight."

(On 3-point shooting vs. Troy): "We need to get back to making seven, eight, nine 3-pointers a game. Raymond (Cintron) was 5-for-7 and he feels very confident, and Kerry (Hammonds) and James Gallman shot well, too. I think seven to nine is a really good number to make in a college game. But we have found a way to win when we only made two or three in a game. We had 23 assists on 26 baskets made, and that is phenomenal.

"We shared the ball well tonight, and we'll take that. Twenty-three assists to 14 turnovers is a good number."

(On Troy's Will Weathers): "He played tremendous tonight. Everybody considers him the best point guard in our league, and he played like it tonight. We couldn't keep him out of the paint. I didn't think our bigs did a good enough job of contesting and blocking shots, and we had zero blocks in the game, so we were not a factor at all around the rim, and we've got to be."

LARON DENDY: "Getting 20 wins is big in college basketball. Twenty wins, two losses, and undefeated in the conference. That's big time. We've just got to keep going, and do what we have to do."

RAYMOND CINTRON: "We always look inside first, but I feel comfortable in my shot. I just have to get my confidence and shoot the ball, and just let it go. I just have to take my shot, not force

anything, and hopefully it will go in."

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