Record-setting win for Blue Raiders in 68-66 victory over North Texas

MT now program-best 10-0 in Sun Belt

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DENTON, Texas - Marcos Knight scored a career-high 19 points and the Blue Raider men's basketball team withstood a late rally from the North Texas Mean Green to hold on for a 68-66 victory on Thursday night at The Super Pit. Middle Tennessee is now 21-3 overall and 10-0 in the Sun Belt, marking the best league start in school history. The Blue Raiders surpassed the 9-0 conference start from 1974-75 when MT was a member of the Ohio Valley Conference. In addition to leading the team in scoring, Knight also topped the Blue Raiders with seven rebounds. LaRon Dendy added 12 points, five rebounds and three blocks, while Raymond Cintron finished with 10 points. Bench play proved crucial again for the MT, as the Blue Raiders owned a 21-7 advantage in the category. Kerry Hammonds delivered an all-around solid performance, scoring nine points and tallying three rebounds, three assists a block and a steal, and Shawn Jones also provided the Blue Raiders some leverage off the bench with nine points on 4-of-5 shooting, in addition to two steals and a block. MT finished the contest shooting 50 percent compared to the Mean Green's 40 percent and owned a 35-32 advantage on the boards. North Texas (13-10, 6-4 SBC) set the tone early thanks to Alzee Williams' six straight points to open the game. Williams went on to score a game-high 29 points, while Tony Mitchell posted a double-double with 16 points and 11 boards. With the game knotted at 7-7 just over five minutes in, North Texas went on a 13-4 run to take a 20-11 at the 12:21 mark. The nine-point advantage, however, would be the Mean Green's largest of the game. The Blue Raiders muscled their way back with 14 unanswered points to take the lead at the 7:03 mark in the first half, a lead they would not relinquish for the remainder of the game. The combo of Hammonds and Jones off the bench kick-started the spurt, as Hammonds found Jones for a dunk to put an end to the Mean

Green's run. It was all Blue Raiders for the next nine minutes, as MT held North Texas without a field goal for 9:23 and built the lead to as many as five with 4:48 to play in the frame. Hammonds came up with a steal and translated to his first bucket, then Knight got in on the action with a mid-range jumper in the paint. MT continued the onslaught after Mitchell missed a layup and Jimmy Oden came down with the rebound then found Hammonds wide open for a 3-pointer to tie the game with 7:28 to go before the break. On North Texas' next possession, JT Sulton stepped in the passing lane and Hammonds came up with the ball for the breakaway layup to give the Blue Raiders their first lead in 10 minutes. Knight followed with a free throw and tip-in to stretch the lead to five at the 4:48 mark. Although North Texas was able to trim the deficit to three with just under three minutes to go, a dunk from Dendy and triple for Oden made it an eight-point game. Cintron's trey with 31 seconds on the clock would give MT a 36-26 halftime lead. The Blue Raiders built the lead to as many as 15 early in the second half, as Knight turned up the heat on the offensive end, scoring 14 points in the latter stanza. Although Williams reeled off the Mean Green's first eight points to open the second frame, MT had a response each time, getting production from Knight, Sulton, Dendy and Jones to maintain the double-digit lead. MT's lead dwindled to two thanks to a 17-2 North Texas run, including a couple of key treys from Brandan Walton, and the Mean Green worked it down to one after Mitchell sank a pair of free throws with 6:59 remaining. Knight answered with a pair of his own free throws then sandwiched a jumper around a Sulton dunk to give MT a seven-point cushion. But the Mean Green inched within two again on a 3-pointer from Niko Stojiljkovic and Walton free throw. The final two minutes proved to be a wild sequence featuring four blocks and several loose balls, but it was Hammonds who eventually made his way to the charity stripe with seven seconds left and sank both free throws to seal MT's victory. The Blue Raiders head now head to Denver for a Saturday contest. Tipoff is slated for 3 p.m. CT and the game will air on ESPN2 with Dave Flemming and Sean Farnham on the call. **Postgame Quotes**

Head coach Kermit Davis

On the hard-fought win

"Give North Texas credit. They really came back. But I thought we showed a lot of poise in the end. It was a tough road win. Good win for the Raiders." *On Marcos Knight's performance*

"We really challenged him in practice because he had gotten away from being the aggressive player that he is. We kind of road his coattails in the second half and called some set plays for him. He was terrific and made shots." *On MT's bench play*

"I thought Kerry played really well. He played physical and we put him in the game late for his guarding and rebounding. Jimmy Oden also came in and played well. The bench was good tonight."

Junior guard Marcos Knight

On his 19-point performance

"Coach Davis has been on me the whole week of practice. He said I hadn't been rebounding very well, but he told me to get my toughness back in this game. I listened to him because he's a great coach, so I guess it worked tonight." On first-half defense

"We didn't defend very well in the beginning and coach called a couple of timeouts and got onto us about not defending. After those timeouts, when he told us we had to defend to win this game, that's what we did."