Blue Raiders drop tough one at Denver

Dendy notched 15 points, Knight 14

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DENVER - The Middle Tennessee men's basketball team suffered a 75-60 defeat to the Denver Pioneers on Saturday afternoon at Magness Arena. LaRon Dendy led the Blue Raiders with 15 points, while Marcos Knight scored 14 and JT Sulton added 10 as MT fell to 21-4 overall and 10-1 in the Sun Belt. Dendy also grabbed a team-high seven rebounds, chipped in three assists and had one blocked shot. Knight had three assists as well, in addition to five rebounds and two blocks. Although MT shot a season-best 81 percent from the free throw line (17-for-21) and held a 28-25 advantage on the boards over the Pioneers (17-7, 7-4 SBC), it was turnovers that proved costly for the Blue Raiders. DU forced 17 turnovers and translated them to 21 points, while the Pioneers gave the ball away just eight times for 12 points the other way. The Blue Raiders allowed an uncharacteristic 50 percent shooting, including 40 points in the paint for DU, while knocking down 46.5 percent of their own shots and scoring 24 in the paint. Chris Udofia led the Pioneers' charge, scoring a game-high 27 points to go along with a game-high nine rebounds. Rob Lewis tacked on 17 points and Royce O'Neal had 14. It was a battle in the early going, featuring 10 first-half lead changes and four ties. Lewis scored the first eight points for Denver, while MT spread the ball around with early bucks from Raymond Cintron and Sulton, then Massey knocked down a pair of free throws and added a floater to give MT a 9-6 advantage. Udofia hit back-to-back layups sandwiched around a tip-in from Shawn Jones to put Denver up, 12-11, seven minutes into the contest. Another layup for the Pioneers made

it a 3-point deficit, but Knight answered with five consecutive points to give MT a 16-14 lead. Tied at 18 with 7:44 to play in the frame, Sulton knocked down two free throws and added a slam to give MT its largest lead of the game at 22-18. But Udofia's triple quickly cut it back to a one-point game. Down the stretch of the first half, free throws kept it close. Jones knocked down two before Udofia's pair made it a four-point game in favor of DU. Sulton hit a jumper and Dendy sank a freebie to cut the deficit back to one, but O'Neale hit three from the charity stripe in the final 1:24 to give the Pioneers a 34-31 lead at the break. Dendy opened the second stanza with a layup and two minutes later, Cintron drained a triple to tie the game at 38. It was as close as the Blue Raiders would get the rest of the way, as DU went on an 8-0 run to take the lead for good. Cintron's 3-pointer from the corner brought MT back within three midway through the second half, then the two teams traded layups to make it a 52-49 Pioneer lead. That's when the Blue Raiders hit a cold spell, going four and a half minutes without a field goal. Knight broke the drought with a jumper to keep MT within six at the 5:00 minute mark, but free throws stretched the Pioneers' lead to double-figures. MT hit another wall on the offensive end, going another four minutes without a basket, while DU went on a 7-0 run and stretched the lead to as many as 17 before claiming the 75-60 win. The Blue Raiders return home for their next three contests, beginning with WKU on Thursday. Tipoff against the Hilltoppers is slated for 7 p.m. CT and the game will air on ESPN3. MT will then host UALR on Saturday at noon on ESPN2.

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