Blue Raiders upset by Arkansas State in Sun Belt Championship quarterfinal

MT awaits NCAA tournament announcement

March 4, 2012 · Athletic Communications

Postgame Quotes

HOT SPRINGS, Ark. - The top-seeded Middle Tennessee men's basketball team jumped out to an 11-point lead early against No. 9 seed Arkansas State , but a 15-2 spurt late in the first half propelled the Red Wolves to a 64-61 victory in the quarterfinals of the Sun Belt Championship on Sunday evening at Summit Arena. Four Blue Raiders scored double-figures, led by Raymond Cintron's 15. Cintron matched his career-high with five 3-pointers in the contest. Sun Belt Player of the Year LaRon Dendy finished as MT's second-leading scorer with 14 points and a team-high seven rebounds. Marcos Knight tallied 13, and Shawn Jones added 12. Bruce Massey finished the contest with six assists and a pair of steals. Although the Blue Raiders (25-6) matched their season-low of eight turnovers, the Red Wolves (14-19) owned a 39-28 advantage on the glass and outscored MT 28-26 in the paint. MT's bench struggled as well, mustering just two points on the evening as the Blue Raiders finished the contest shooting 43.1 percent. Free throws again proved to be the Blue Raiders' Achilles heel. Twice in the final minute MT had a chance to tie the game, but the Blue Raiders missed five consecutive free throws in the closing 61 seconds to seal their fate. In the early going, however, the Blue Raiders couldn't miss. Dendy opened the contest

with a 3-pointer and MT hit four of its first five shots en route to a 10-2 run to start the game. MT continued to mount its lead, building it to double-figures when Dendy hit a layup with 8:11 remaining in the frame to make it 22-11. The Blue Raiders held onto the lead until the 2:18 mark. That's when the Red Wolves took their first lead of the game after back-to-back triples from Marcus Hooten and Trey Finn, capping the 15-2 run for a 28-26 ASU lead. Finn finished as the Red Wolves' leading-scorer with 16 points, while Hooten added 15. Jones' jumper tied the contest at 28 all, but Finn answered with a layup and Brandon Peterson tacked on a free throw to give ASU the 31-28 halftime advantage. Trailing by seven with 18:25 remaining, the Blue Raiders went on an 8-0 run and regained the lead at 39-38 when Cintron nailed a triple from the corner. The lead was shortlived, however, as Peterson put ASU back on top with a layup, a lead the Red Wolves wouldn't relinquish the rest of the way. Peterson collected a game-high eight rebounds and also had 13 points. A 7-0 spurt for ASU made it an eight-point margin, the largest lead of the game for the Red Wolves, with just under nine minutes to go. The Blue Raiders battled back, cutting the deficit to two when JT Sulton tipped in his only basket of the game. A pair of free throws for Knight brought MT within one at the 1:39 mark. Dendy stepped to the line with MT trailing 60-59 at the 1:01 mark and missed a pair of free throws, then Massey had his shot at tying the contest with 24 seconds left, but also missed twice. Malcoln Kirkland sank two free throws with 20 seconds to go to give ASU A three-point cushion, but Dendy's rebound and putback with 13 seconds on the clock once again made it a one-point game. Dendy was fouled on the play and had the opportunity to turn a three-point play and tie the contest, but another missed free throw proved costly. Hooten hit two free throws with 10 seconds to play and although MT had the final shot, Knight's driving layup missed as the Red Wolves held on for the victory. MT now awaits the announcement of the NCAA tournament bracket on Sunday, March 11 beginning at 5 p.m. CT. The Blue Raiders have clinched an NIT berth and the NIT field will be announced at 8 p.m. CT on ESPNU.

Printed on May 25, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/59186