Strong second half propels Blue Raiders to season-opening win

Jason Jones a perfect 9-for-9 from the field with 19 points

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Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Senior forward Jason Jones was a perfect 9-for-9 from the field for 19 points, leading the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team to a 97-53 victory over Alabama State in the season-opener at Murphy Center on Friday night.

Senior guard James Gallman also reached double figures with 15 points thanks to his 5-for-7 performance from 3-point land. Tweety Knight scored nine points and collected a game-high five assists. Senior guard Bruce Massey matched Knight in the category as MT produced 27 assists on 33 baskets. Junior forward Neiko Hunter also had nine points, while senior forward JT Sulton neared a double-double with eight points and nine rebounds.

MT (1-0) finished the contest shooting 48.5 percent, including a 57.9 percent clip in the second half. The Blue Raiders limited the Hornets (0-1) to 26.9 percent shooting in the second half and 36.2 percent for the game.

The 97 points marked the most since MT scored 109 against Houston Baptist on Feb. 13, 2010.

The Blue Raiders travel to Savannah State Tuesday for the first road test of the season. Tipoff is slated for 6 p.m. CT.

FIRST HALF RECAP
• James Gallman opened the contest with a triple
• Neiko Hunter with offensive board and put-back with 9:29 to go
• Trailing 28-25 with 3:59 left, Bruce Massey knocks down three straight free throws and sparks a 15-1 run

• Jason Jones takes charge with game tied at 28 then knocks down jumper at opposite end with 2:15 to play
• Next ASU possession, Kerry Hammonds forces turnover and Jason Jones converts breakaway layup to make it a four-point lead
• JT Sulton takes charge on next possession and Raymond Cintron knocks down triple to make it a 7-0 run with 1:13 to go
• MT closes first half on a 15-1 run

SECOND HALF RECAP
• James Gallman opened second half with another triple, his third of the game
• JT Sulton with a nasty rejection and Bruce Massey converts with a layup at the opposite end for the 45-31 lead with 18:21 to go
• Jason Jones the first in double figures with 10 points at the 17:49 mark, giving MT a 16-point lead
• MT opened half on an 13-2 run
• Bruce Massey forces turnover and throws ahead to Jason Jones for the dunk and 22-point lead
• Slick pass from Jason Jones and the finish by Neiko Hunter makes it 64-33 with 12:57 to go
• Tweety Knight with back-to-back treys for his first points of the game midway through second half
• Raymond Cintron makes it three consecutive treys with 9:52 to go for the 73-38 lead
• Bruce Massey with the alley-oop to Shawn Jones and the one-handed dunk with 6:16 to play

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS QUOTES

Opening comments...
The two telling stats the past two games are the number of assists to baskets (27 to 33) and the bench scoring. I think this is the second straight game we've had over 50 points from our bench. I thought Alabama State really, really played a really good first half. I thought they played hard, they were physical. We fouled them way too much. I think in the second half our depth just kind of wore them down. We were fun to watch in the second half.

On struggles in the first half...
First games are always tough. First games, teams are a little tight, they're ready to go. We missed some really good shots in the first half early. They (Alabama State) were active in their zone. The second half, we got more stops and got in transition. That's where we are good, when we can get in transition and start sharing the ball and went on that really good run.

On Jason Jones' play...
We had a lot of other guys in foul trouble. I was proud of Jason. He shared the ball well and really gave us a good lift. It's amazing how you get an opportunity, probably because of an injury and foul trouble. He was probably our best four-man tonight. I'm happy for Jason because he spent so much time in the spring and the summer in the gym and he's developed into a really good teammate. We're tickled to death for him.

On James Gallman's hot shooting...
He has played that way all fall. He's played with such great confidence, he's guarded, and every time he lets it go you think it's going in. He's one of those guys who has played exactly like he practiced.

On versatility in lineups...
Depending on other team's size, playing small or big, we can differ from night to night.

On seeing zone defense...
We've prepared for it, but Alabama State has played all man (on tape). You watch tape from last year; we were a really good man-to-man offensive team. We didn't shoot it last year like we have this year, so maybe that is, but it's good that those tapes get out. Savannah State is a physical man-to-man team, so we'll see that then.

On halftime talk...
We didn't get in transition very much in the first half because we didn't guard and we were fouling. We knew if we could get stops then the floor gets spread, and that's when we're in transition and we're at our best. I thought we settled for some jump shots. In the second half, we hit threes, but they were inside out threes. We had paint touches and great passes out. Those are the ones that usually go in.

On depth of team...
College basketball is a long haul. Hate it for Jac (Rozier). Played so good and earned his starting spot, and he breaks his hand. You're going to have some nicks and bruises and foul trouble, and that's when the depth of our team will really help us.

JAMES GALLMAN QUOTES
Confidence in himself...
I know I can do it. I know I can shoot three's. I've been working hard all off-season. Trying to be the best for the team, trying to help our team out and get a win.

On team's fast breaks...
We just have to run. We just have to box out and get rebounds and just run.

JASON JONES QUOTES
On coming back from injury last season...
Everything happens for a reason. This game was a good game for me. I want to thank coach for giving me the opportunity. He knows I worked hard all summer and fall coming in to prepare for this game. I didn't even know I was perfect from the field. When you play hard and unselfish, things just happen for you.

On team's performance...
We say it before every game, just go out and have fun. Once you're having fun and playing hard, things just get flowing. You've got to give credit to the fans. There were a lot of fans and they were alive. You just feed off that.

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