Shawn Jones' career day leads Blue Raiders to win over UCF

Jones' 18 points, 13 rebounds both career-highs

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Box Score (PDF)

ORLANDO - Shawn Jones' career day led the Blue Raider men's basketball team to a 75-61 victory over UCF on Tuesday night at UCF Arena. Jones posted his second career double-double with 18 points and 13 rebounds, both career-highs.

Middle Tennessee's (3-1) win snapped the Knights' (3-1) 22-game non-conference home winning streak and marked their first loss of the season.

In addition to Jones, who made those most of playing in his home state of Florida, four other Blue Raiders scored double figures. Raymond Cintron tallied 14 points to go along with five assists, Neiko Hunter added 13 points and James Gallman and Marcos Knight each chipped in 11. Those four also proved clutch from beyond the arc, each hitting at least one triple, led by Cintron with four, as MT was 52.9 percent from 3-point land.

The Blue Raiders finished shooting 50 percent from the field thanks to hitting 60 percent of their shots in the second half. They also owned a 33-31 rebounding advantage and had only eight turnovers while forcing UCF to turn the ball over 14 times.

While it was a back-and-forth contest through the first half, with UCF holding a 33-30 advantage at the break, MT's 20-4 run in the second half proved to be the difference in the game. Trailing 46-44 with 11:14 to play, it was a Cintron 3-pointer that put the Blue Raiders back on top for good. The Knights managed to tie it on the next possession, but Jones scored MT's next five points and the Blue Raiders held UCF scoreless over a 3:46 stretch during the onslaught.

UCF wouldn't go quietly, though, trimming the deficit to nine on a pair of Keith Clanton free throws with 5:01 remaining. Clanton finished with 15 points and eight rebounds, nearly matching Tristan Spurlock's 17 points and eight boards.

Following Clanton's freebies, Knight went on a tear, scoring the Blue Raiders' next seven points to push the lead back to 14 with 1:55 to go. Bruce Massey sank a pair of free throws and Hunter slammed one home to give MT its biggest advantage of the game at 75-59 with 1:40 left in the contest before the Blue Raiders sealed the 14-point win.

MT overcame a seven-point first-half deficit in the victory. The Blue Raiders trailed, 29-22, with 5:11 to go before cutting it to a three-point game 40 seconds later. The Knights again widened the margin to seven with 1:08 remaining in the half before Cintron hit a layup and Jones came up with a steal and dunk at the other end of the three-point halftime difference.

Another Gallman triple to open the second half created the fifth tie of the contest and the two teams battled through the first 10 minutes of the second frame before MT broke the game open.

The Blue Raiders return home this weekend to host Texas Southern. The two teams will square off Saturday in Murphy Center at 6 p.m. following the football game versus Troy, which begins at 2:30 p.m.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

Opening statement...
"I'm proud of our team. We were together tonight. We looked more like the team we expect to have and it was a really good win over a really good Conference USA team."

On team's performance...
"We've challenged our leadership in the last week and they were good. You can't say enough about Shawn Jones was terrific tonight. James Gallman and how good was Raymond Cintron tonight. He play-made with 14 points, five assists and zero turnovers."

On rebounding this week...
"We came on this trip and played two very athletic teams in college basketball and we out-rebounded both teams. That's hard to do, especially because we're limited size-wise. I'm really proud of our toughness, both defensively and offensively."

JUNIOR FORWARD SHAWN JONES

On mood of the team going into the game...
"After the Florida loss, everybody was really upset. When we came back to practice everyone got focused. We put all of our focus on this team to come out and get the win."

On tonight's game plan...
"We came out and played better man (defense) this time. We doubled down on (Keith) Clanton and closed out the shooters."

On picking up two road wins already...
"It means a lot to this team. We're going to take the wins and prepare for the rest of the season so we can keep winning."