Shawn Jones records second-straight double-double in MT win over Texas Southern

Jones nets career-high 21 points, grabs 12 rebounds

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Led by a career-high 21 points and game-high 12 rebounds from junior forward Shawn Jones, the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team cruised to a 79-52 win over the Texas Southern Tigers at the Murphy Center on Saturday evening.

Jones made 9-of-12 shots from the field and pulled down nine offensive rebounds. His double-double was his second in as many games. As a team, the Blue Raiders turned 18 offensive rebounds into 18 second chance points. Marcos Knight added 14 points and eight rebounds. Neiko Hunter was the third Blue Raider in double-figures, putting up 13 points. MT shot 47.7 percent from the field for the game.

Texas Southern (1-5) scored first on a 3-pointer by Stephen Bedford at the 18:58 mark of the opening half. The Tigers led for all of 42 seconds, as back-to-back Hunter baskets put MT (4-1) in front 4-3. Hunter's two buckets sparked a 10-2 run over the next 2:57. Knight scored the last five points of the run that put the Blue Raiders ahead 10-6 with 15:23 remaining in the half. The lead grew to 10 at the 12:04 mark when Jones grabbed an offensive rebound and slammed it back down to make the score 16-6.

The Blue Raiders made a big run halfway through the opening period to pull away from Texas Southern. After a Raymond Penn three-point play got the Tigers within six at 18-12 with 11:01 to play, MT went on a 21-3 run over the next 7:06 to take a commanding 39-15 lead. Hunter, Jones and Knight scored all 21 points during that stretch as Texas Southern made just 1-of-7 shots from the field and committed three turnovers. The Tigers cut the deficit to 21 by halftime, as a Law Johnson-Danner three-point play made the score 41-20.

MT used a 7-0 run early in the second half to extend its lead to 26 points. Two Hunter baskets and a

pair of Bruce Massey free throws gave the Blue Raiders a 48-22 advantage with 16:27 remaining in the game. The lead grew to 28 points at the 13:14 mark as Jason Jones put in a layup off of a Tweety Knight steal to make the score 52-24. Texas Southern would only get as close as 21 points the rest of the way, as the Blue Raiders' 45.2 percent shooting from the field in the second half powered them to the 27-point win.

MT held Texas Southern to 39.6 percent shooting from the field and 26.1 percent from the 3-point arc. The Blue Raiders were dominant on the boards, out-rebounding the Tigers 46-24. That is MT's highest rebound differential since out-rebounding Tennessee-Temple by 22 on Nov. 12, 2010. The Blue Raiders forced 14 Texas Southern turnovers, scoring 18 points off those turnovers while only committing six turnovers themselves. Johnson-Danner led the Tigers with 14 points.

MT returns to the road to open Sun Belt play on Thursday, Nov. 29 with a 7 p.m. game at Louisiana.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

"I have a lot of respect for head coach Mike Davis at Texas Southern, and I feel sure they will win the SWAC. I was proud of our team the first 17-18 minutes. We got off to a really good start, played with a lot of energy and shared the ball. We kind of lost our way the second half, but we talked about it being 0-0 and playing four minutes segments. But give Texas Southern credit."

(On Shawn Jones): "I'm just excited to see Shawn Jones playing the way he's playing, which is as good as any big in our league right now. He's had two straight double-doubles and he's active. It was a good game, but we've just got to keep grinding, keep getting better and better in practice."

(On Neiko Hunter): "He's got a nose to score, he can rebound it, good passer, and he's just gotten more comfortable. He really played well at UCF, so that combination of Shawn and Neiko, they both can really shoot, they need to be a little more physical around the goal, but they are a good combination right now."

(On depth off the bench): "We hope that will be a big plus for us, especially in league play. We can absorb some foul trouble, and the nicks and bruises that are part of the game. I thought Kerry (Hammonds) came in and played well. JT (Sulton) has suffered some back trouble, but he's okay now, now he just has to get better, to play better. Jason Jones gave us some good minutes. I brought Bruce (Massey) in off the bench because Tweety Knight has been playing better than Bruce the last couple of days in practice. That is the beauty of the depth we have."

(On improved rebounding): "We weren't really a very good rebounding team before we went to Florida, but we out-rebounded both Florida and UCF, and they are both big athletic teams. Our rebounding has gotten much better. We only gave up six offensive rebounds tonight. That has been a subject of huge interest, and it's good to see that what we have emphasized in practice carry over."

JUNIOR FORWARD SHAWN JONES

On new career high, second game in a row...
"Everyday I'm just working hard to find my place on the court. Last year, I just got into foul trouble a lot, and this year I'm just trying to do all the right things and stay on the court more."

On attitude for the Texas Southern game...
"Practice like we were playing a regular conference game: we wanted to take care of business."

On back-to-back double-doubles...
"It feels good. I'm just trying to put myself in a situation where the team can trust me and they can expect what they are going to get out of me every night."

On preparation for games, gaining more confidence in shot...
"Coach (Greg) Grensing is always telling me that when I shoot, I always need to follow through and just have confidence in my shot."

JUNIOR FORWARD NEIKO HUNTER
On being more comfortable...
"I don't feel like I'm 100 percent knowing the chemistry of the game, but I just try to go out and give 100 percent on the court and give a good effort and play as hard as I can play."

Position most comfortable in...
"I like posting up, but I like pick n pop things, too. I feel more confident in the post."

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