Hammonds' late jumper buries Ole Miss as MT earns 65-62 win

Blue Raiders are 19-2 over past two seasons in Murphy Center

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Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Kerry Hammonds' jumper with 40 seconds remaining proved to be the difference Saturday afternoon as the Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders defeated the Ole Miss Rebels, 65-62, at Murphy Center.

The win was MT's fifth in the last six games and fourth in a row against Ole Miss. The Blue Raiders handed the Rebels (6-1) their first loss of the season while MT (7-2) remained undefeated on its home court this year at 4-0.

Marcos Knight led the Blue Raiders with 14 points, his eighth straight game in double-figures. Raymond Cintron added 10 points, making 3-of-4 three-pointers. The Blue Raiders scored 23 points off 18 Ole Miss turnovers and outscored the Rebels 32-30 in the paint. The Rebels entered the contest leading the country with a +9.0 turnover margin, but MT owned a +4.0 advantage in the game.

MT erased a six-point Ole Miss lead early in the first half, when Marcos Knight and Tweety Knight combined for seven straight points to take a 14-13 lead with 12:03 remaining in the half. The Blue Raiders led by as much as seven points in the first half before taking a 33-29 lead at halftime.

The Rebels used an 11-4 run to start the second half, taking a 40-37 lead with 16:44 to play. MT answered with a 10-2 run to go ahead 47-42. The Blue Raiders led by seven, 59-52, with 3:45 to play before Ole Miss went on a 7-0 run to tie the game 59-59 with 2:08 to play. Hammonds then broke the tie with his basket from the corner with 40 seconds left. JT Sulton and Bruce Massey each converted a free throw to make it a four-point cushion before Jarvis Summers knocked down a triple with 1.7 seconds remaining. Cintron knocked down a free throw at the opposite end with 0.9 to go and the Rebels turned the ball over on the in-bounds pass to seal the Blue Raider win.

Four Rebels scored double-figures, led by Marshall Henderson with 17. Murphy Holloway and Nick Williams each had 11 and Reginald Buckner added 10.

The Blue Raiders are next in action on Thursday, Dec. 13 when MT travels to Belmont. Tipoff is set for 6 p.m. on CSS and ESPN3.

FIRST HALF

• Jason Jones' three-point play at the 17:35 mark gave MT its first lead of the game, 5-4.
• Ole Miss used five Murphy Holloway points in a 9-2 run to take a 13-7 lead with 14:19 to play.
• Marcos and Trantell Knight combined for seven straight Blue Raiders points to give MT a 14-13 lead with 12:03 remaining in the half. Trantell Knight got a steal and went end-to-end for the go-ahead layup.
• MT held the Rebels without a field goal for a stretch of 4:09 to take the lead.
• Marcos Knight's layup with 9:03 to play in the half capped off a 12-2 Blue Raiders run over 5:16, giving MT a 19-15 lead.
• Ole Miss' first basket from outside the paint came at the 6:11 mark on a Nick Williams three-pointer that tied the game 22-22. The Rebels' other 10 baskets in the half came in the paint.
• A JT Sulton three-point play and a Shawn Jones dunk put MT in the lead 27-26 at the 3:54 mark of the half. Those baskets sparked an 11-0 Blue Raiders run that gave MT a 33-26 lead with 2:13 to play.
• MT held the Rebels to two field goals (2-for-5) over the last 6:11 to take a 33-29 lead at halftime. The Blue Raiders also forced five turnovers during that final stretch of the half.

SECOND HALF
• Ole Miss made four of its first five shots from the field to start the second half, going on an 11-4 run to take a 40-37 lead with 16:44 to play.
• Three-pointers by Raymond Cintron and Kerry Hammonds sparked a Blue Raider 10-2 run that put MT in the lead 47-42 with 12:39 remaining in the game. Baskets by Marcos Knight and Trantell Knight capped off the run.
• After Marshall Henderson's three-pointer put Ole Miss in the lead 40-37 with 17:53 remaining, the Rebels were held without a field goal until the 9:46 mark.
• Shawn Jones' dunk at the 5:44 mark gave the Blue Raiders their largest lead of the game, eight points, 56-48.
• MT led 59-52 after a Shawn Jones' three-point play with 3:45 to go. Ole Miss went on a 7-0 run capped off by a Henderson three to tie the game at 59-59 with 2:08 to go.
• Hammonds broke the tie with a jumper in the corner with 40 seconds left, making the score 61-59. The Blue Raiders then made 3-out-of-4 free throws to take a 64-59 lead.

MT POSTGAME NOTES
• MT is now 7-2 on the season
• MT remained undefeated at home with a 4-0 record
• MT has won 17 straight regular-season home games and is now 19-2 in Murphy Center over the past two seasons
• MT defeated Ole Miss for the second year in a row and has now won four straight meetings with the Rebels
• With the win, MT has now beaten an SEC opponent in back-to-back seasons for the first time in program history

• It marked the first win over an SEC opponent in Murphy Center since a 93-90 overtime victory against Vanderbilt on Feb. 1, 1995
• MT is now 1-1 against the SEC this year (Lost to No. 10 Florida on Nov. 18) and has won three of the last five meetings against SEC opponents:
o MT 65, Ole Miss 62 (12/8/12)
o #10 UF 66, MT 44 (11/18/12)
o MT 71, UT 64 (3/19/12)
o VU 84, MT 77 (1/28/12)
o MT 68, Ole Miss 56 (12/21/11)
• Marcos Knight has scored double figures in eight straight games, all but one game this year, scoring 14 tonight

MT HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS
"What a great atmosphere in Murphy Center. We appreciate everyone coming out on a Saturday. It was good. Ole Miss is a really good team with a lot of experience. They're going to win a lot of SEC games. It was just kind of a physical SEC half-court, grind-it-out game. I was really proud. We kind of had the game in hand and had some opportunities we missed. Ole Miss made some great plays to tie the game. Kerry Hammonds came in and made a super play and we got a stop when we needed it. It was a big RPI win against a team that will win a lot of games."

On the importance of Saturday's win...
"It was critical. I think we had a great crowd tonight. It just kind of solidifies your program when you can win in front of a crowd like that at home. All those RPI games are critical at the end of the year. In our region, to win an SEC game like that helps your recruiting and every aspect of your program."

On the performance of the bench ...
"Kerry Hammonds played great off the bench. I thought Tweety Knight gave us great minutes off the bench. It was good to see JT Sulton do some nice things. He looked healthier for the first time this year. We also got good minutes from Torin Walker. It was a game of depth and our bench played well."

Bruce Massey (On pestering Ole Miss' back-up point guards when Jarvis Summers left the game): "The game plan was to get them off rhythm, and coach had been on me and Tweety (Knight) about pressuring the ball all week. We knew that they only had one point guard, and that was Summers, and when he got into foul trouble, we knew we could attack their back-up point guards, so that is what we did."

(On the challenge of halting Ole Miss' high-scoring offense): "It's more of a team challenge, them averaging 87 a game. With me and Tweety pressuring the ball, they can't really run their stuff, but it was a team effort. The bigs have to rebound, we have to box out, and they have to help me and Tweety if we do get beat."

(How much does a game like this help the team?): "It helps us a lot. We know that all conference games are going to be like this, and we play everybody twice. When it comes down to it, it's about executing, and we all know each other. These games help us get ready for our conference games."

Kerry Hammonds (On his shot with 40 seconds left to give MT the lead for good): "We had run something, and JT (Sulton) picked up his dribble, and he didn't have anyone to throw it to, so I just

came and got it on the handoff. I wanted to go to the rim, but I felt Henderson on my hip, so I just shot over him. I had to shoot it. If I'm open, I'm going to shoot it."

(On game atmosphere): "It was amazing. We knew it was going to be a big game. We don't have a lot of opportunities for SEC teams to come to the Murphy Center, so we have to take advantage of it. It means a lot. The crowd was large and everybody was cheering. They will probably come to more home games because they want to see more games like that."

Massey (On team being "hungry"): "We post little quotes about being hungry every day in our locker room. Last year, we had a bitter taste in our mouth about losing in the second round of the Sun Belt Conference tournament, so coming into this season, we had a little chip on our shoulder. Winning games like this is one step closer to getting to the NCAA tournament. We have to take advantage of opportunities like this. We know Ole Miss has a good RPI, and beating them helps us out a lot in the long run."

OLE MISS HEAD COACH ANDY KENNEDY

"We were having such a hard time scoring. For a team that averages 87 points a game, you would have never known that tonight. I was anticipating some of this. I knew that Middle was not going to allow you to have easy cuts. They were not going to allow you to go where you wanted to go. You had to be resilient and you had to execute."

"What I didn't anticipate was the fact that we would just hand them the ball. They just took our ball like what happens when you play with your big brother. When you go on the road and you turn it over 18 times and you give the home team 23 points off turnovers, quite honestly I was proud that our guys continued to grind to give us a chance to tie the game at 59. It was a very physical game from the jump. Kermit's not complaining about it, neither am I. I think that's how both of us want to play. But the game ends when our point guard gets to the center of the lane and misses a shot with contact. On the other end, Hammonds makes a shot with contact. That, in essence, was the game."

On the importance of the game for Middle Tennessee...

"It was equally as important for us. I probably did our team a disservice in that I think we were the only college team in the country that had not been on the road yet. Some of that, quite frankly, just happened. Now, to go on the road and your point guard goes down with two fouls early. His backup was just cleared to practice last Thursday. The kid that we're playing there is a wing, and it was honestly the worst-case scenario for us because it totally disrupted our flow. We were able in the second half to make it a game."

"This was a huge game for both parties. I wanted to see how we were going to respond against a tough, senior-oriented team. Middle's got to be the most experienced team in college basketball. They play nine, 10 guys and they're all upperclassmen and they have six seniors that play. We knew that they had the most wins of MTSU last year and are the prohibitive favorite to win their conference this year. They're very, very good. That's the reason I scheduled the game. I have a personal relationship with Kermit, one, and also I know we're going to get tested. I know that when you get an SEC team in your building, people are going to be excited. I was looking forward to that and to see how we would respond. I liked the fact that we played with energy and competed until the end. Our execution failed us and as a result, you're not going to be good enough to beat a quality opponent on the road. "

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