Blue Raiders fall to Belmont

Bruins pull away in second half

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Box Score (PDF)

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee men's basketball team kept it close against Belmont through the first half, but a 16-3 run to open the second stanza propelled the Bruins to a 64-49 win on Thursday night at the Curb Event Center.

The Blue Raiders (7-3) shot a season-low 28.6 percent from the field, while Belmont (7-2) hit 50 percent of its shots. JT Sulton neared a double-double for MT with nine points and eight rebounds and Jason Jones added eight points.

Belmont's Kerron Johnson led all scorers with 17 points, while Ian Clark had 15 and Blake Jenkins tacked on 11.

MT owned a 22-8 advantage in bench production and a 19-9 margin in second-chance points, but the Bruins' 36-24 advantage in the paint proved to be the difference. Belmont also out-rebounded the Blue Raiders, 39-37, and blocked seven shots.

The two teams traded the lead five times in the early frame before the Bruins pulled away at halftime. The Blue Raiders led by as many as four in the first half on four different occasions and didn't relinquish the lead until the 8:02 mark when Jenkins tipped in a Johnson miss. The Bruins went up by three on a pair of Jenkins free throws, but Raymond Cintron responded with a triple to knot things at 20 for the first tie of the game.

The Bruins went up by three again with 3:11 remaining in the half, but Tweety Knight's steal on an in-bounds pass and quick layup made it a one-point game with 2:38 to go before the break.

It remained a 27-26 Bruin lead until the buzzer when J.J. Mann knocked down a 3-pointer to give Belmont a 30-26 advantage at halftime.

The Bruins carried that momentum into the second half, scoring the first eight points of the frame.

Belmont led by as many as 18 with five minutes to play and MT never got closer than 11 after the 17:40 mark.

The Blue Raiders look to rebound on Tuesday as they face another in-state foe in Tennessee State. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. in Murphy Center.

MT HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS
On tonight's performance...
"First off, I give all the credit to Belmont. They were the toughest team. We didn't play with the edge that we usually do. I was disappointed because we had a good contingent of Blue Raider fans that came over for the game. I'm embarrassed for our program and the way we played.

"With our schedule, as good as the teams are that we've played, if you don't have your very best edge and juice, this will happen. It starts with me."

On Belmont's defense...
"Belmont guarded us well. They're not known for blocking shots and Jenkins had five. When we play teams like Belmont, we have to be the most physical team around the goal. They were the most physical team around the goal. When Belmont out-physicals you, and they're a physical team, they're tough, but that's got to be our strength in this particular game. We just got soundly whipped in every facet."

MT SENIOR FORWARD JT SULTON
On tonight's game...
"With a team like Belmont that does a good job of pressuring the ball up the court, we didn't do a good job of getting the ball side to side and knocking down good shots. They're a good team, hats off to them."

On lack of ball movement...
"If you don't get the ball reversed, nobody has to guard you. We didn't get the ball side to side and we made it easy for Belmont to guard us."

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