Blue Raiders roll past Tennessee State, 77-48

MT wins 18th straight regular season home game

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Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Led by four players scoring double figures, Middle Tennessee ran away with a 77-48 win against the Tennessee State Tigers on Tuesday night at Murphy Center.

Raymond Cintron led the Blue Raiders with 15 points, tying a career-high with five made three-pointers. Marcos Knight scored 10 of his 14 points in the second half and added a team-high six rebounds. Neiko Hunter and Shawn Jones each scored 13 points. MT (8-3) held Tennessee State (5-7) to 29.8 percent shooting from the field, its lowest field goal percentage allowed this season. Tweety Knight set a new career-high with seven assists. As a team, the Blue Raiders had 20 assists on 28 field goals.

MT took control of the game from the opening tip, going on a 7-2 run in the first 2:47. After Tennessee State cut the lead to three, 8-5, Hunter and Cintron made back-to-back treys to spark a 16-4 run that put the Blue Raiders in front, 24-9, with 10:35 remaining in the half. MT also had a 13-2 run in the first half capped off by three straight Cintron triples to give the Blue Raiders a 39-15 lead with 3:21 to play in the opening stanza.

After a slow start to the second half, the Blue Raiders pulled away on the strength of play by Marcos Knight and Jones. The tandem scored 19 straight MT points to turn a 21-point lead into a 32-point lead, 73-41, with 4:10 to play.

TSU was led by Robert Covington with 17 points and nine rebounds. Patrick Miller added 12 points.

The Blue Raiders are in action next on Friday, Dec. 21 when MT takes on Vanderbilt at Bridgestone Arena. Tipoff in Nashville is set for 8 p.m. with the game being televised on ESPNU.

FIRST HALF

- MT used its seventh different starting five of the season with Neiko Hunter, Bruce Massey, Marcos Knight, Raymond Cintron, and JT Sulton.
- Blue Raiders opened the game on a 7-2 run, getting baskets from Sulton, Knight, and Hunter.
- Back-to-back threes by Hunter and Cintron sparked a 16-4 Blue Raiders run over 5:25, putting MT in front 24-9 with 10:35 remaining in the half.
- Tweety Knight and Shawn Jones connect on an alley-oop at the 11:32 mark to give the Blue Raiders a 20-9 lead.
- 9:57 mark Kerry Hammonds blocks Robert Covington's drive to the basket from the weak side.
- Tennessee State was held without a field goal for 6:10 in the first half. Robert Covington ended that dry spell with a three-pointer with 2:54 to go in the half. During that stretch, MT outscored the Tigers 13-2.
- Cintron made three straight three-pointers to give the Blue Raiders their largest lead of the half, 24 points at 39-15 with 3:21 to play in the first. He finished the half 4-of-5 from beyond the arc for 12 points.
- MT assisted on 12 of its 16 field goals in the first half. Tweety Knight had five assists in the first half.

SECOND HALF

- Cintron tied his career-high for three-pointers in a game with his fifth at the 18:17 mark of the second half, making the score 46-22.
- Hunter scored six straight Blue Raider points to give MT a 54-31 lead with 12:06 to play. That gave him 13 points, tying his career-high.
- MT held Tennessee State without a field goal for 7:14 in the second half. The Tigers missed 12 straight shots from the field during that stretch.
- Hammonds found Shawn Jones for the alleyoop dunk with 7:48 to go, making the score 63-38 Blue Raiders. Jones became the third MT player in double-figures with 13 points.
- Shawn Jones and Marcos Knight combined to score 19 straight points for MT over a stretch of 7:56 in the second half. Jones capped the spurt with a three-point play with 4:10 to go that made the score 73-41. At one point, Knight scored nine straight points capped off by a dunk at the 5:04 mark.
- MT held Tennessee State to 25 percent from the field in the second half.
- The Blue Raiders took their largest lead of the game with 3:58 to play, as a pair of Tweety Knight free throws put MT ahead by 34, 75-41.

POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 8-3 and 1-0 in the Sun Belt
- MT is now 6-0 when leading at halftime
- MT has won 18 straight regular-season home games at Murphy Center
- MT is now 20-2 over the past two seasons at home
- MT used the seventh different starting lineup of the season. It marked the first time Shawn Jones did not start.
- MT held TSU to single digits for more than 10 minutes to open the game.R
- Raymond Cintron cracked double-figure scoring for the fifth time this season and fourth time in the last five games.
- Cintron tied his career-high with five 3-pointers in the game.

- Neiko Hunter had his third double-figure scoring game with 13 points, matching his career high. Tweety Knight collected a career-best seven assists.
- Shawn Jones scored double figures for the fifth time this year with 13 points.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS"I thought that we had really good energy throughout the first half. We've had really competitive, physical practices and I think it showed tonight. I think they're a really good offensive team, and I thought we just put together a really good 20 minutes of physical defense and sharing the ball. Raymond got us off to a good start. We had 20 assists on 28 baskets. When you play that hard and you're that unselfish, it was better than it was against Belmont."

On Shawn Jones..."He was a little rusty in the first half. It was great to see him in the second half get some plays and make some physical plays around the rim. Kerry made some really good passes to him so that was a positive for us."

On the team's chemistry...
"It's really good. I thought our bench enthusiasm and bench play was good. Guys came off and played hard. I thought Kerry Hammonds played well off the bench. Tweety had five assists in the first half. Shawn Jones responded. It was good to see Jacquez Rozier back out there and play some quality minutes. I thought James Gallman played well. We still have to keep getting better. The next two days are critical before we play Vandy."

On the defensive effort...
"I'm proud of the ball pressure. Sometimes when you're playing smaller around the goal, the ball pressure will help you defend the post. I thought our ball pressure was really good in the first half."

On the upcoming Vanderbilt game ...
"It's going to be fun. We're excited to be playing and I know Vanderbilt will be too. Vanderbilt's playing much, much better. I knew that would happen. He had a lot of new pieces and those pieces are starting to play. Kevin's such a good coach. I hope it'll be a real good college game."

JUNIOR FORWARD SHAWN JONES

(On recovery from a seizure on Sunday): I was feeling good. Coach Davis and Drew (Shea) asked me how I was feeling in shoot-around, and I told them I was better than yesterday, because I was still a little dizzy on Monday.

(On missing the effects after missing practice): In the first half, I had to get used to the contact again, but after the first half, I felt like I was back into the groove.

(On coming back strong after loss at Belmont): We just knew that we had to come back with our best effort tonight, because we didn't do that against Belmont.

(On Friday's game vs. Vandy at Bridgestone Arena): We just need to pay attention to our scouting report, and practice hard for them and pay attention to details.