Blue Raiders rally to beat Vanderbilt in thriller

MT comes back from nine points down to defeat Commodores

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Box Score (PDF)

NASHVILLE - Middle Tennessee rallied back from a nine-point second-half deficit, ending the game on a 16-3 run to defeat the Vanderbilt Commodores 56-52 at Bridgestone Arena Friday night. The win is the Blue Raiders' fourth in their last six games against SEC programs and the first against Vanderbilt since Feb.1, 1995.

MT (9-3) jumped out to an early seven-point lead in the first half, but needed two Bruce Massey baskets to force a 31-31 halftime tie. Vanderbilt (5-5) started the second half on an 11-4 run to take a 42-35 lead with 16:11 to play. The Commodores led 49-40 with 9:57 to play when the Blue Raider defense took over. MT held Vanderbilt to 1-of-9 shooting from the field for the rest of the game, as the Blue Raiders went on an 11-1 run capped off by a Raymond Cintron layup to take a 51-50 lead with 3:32 to play. It marked MT's first lead since the 1:36 mark of the first half. The Commodores took back the lead on a Kedren Johnson jumper with 1:55 remaining, but that would be Vanderbilt's last basket of the night. Layups by Tweety Knight and Kerry Hammonds in the final minute secured the Blue Raiders' win.

Massey led MT with 17 points, making 7-of-10 shots from the field. Hammonds added 11 points off the bench, as the Blue Raider reserves outscored Vanderbilt's, 27-8. Shawn Jones had eight points and a game-high nine rebounds. MT shot 43.8% from the field and out-rebounded the Commodores, 34-25. The Blue Raiders scored 32 points in the paint including 12 second chance points.

Johnson led Vanderbilt with a game-high 25 points.

The win concludes non-conference action for MT, as the Blue Raiders return to Murphy Center on Saturday, Dec. 29 to face the FIU Panthers. Tipoff is scheduled for 5 p.m.

FIRST HALF

- Raymond Cintron's field goal at the 16:47 mark was the Blue Raiders first of the game and put MT ahead 4-3.
- Shawn Jones' dunk, part of a three-point play, sparked a 10-2 MT run over 2:34 that put the Blue Raiders in the lead 12-5 with 14:34 to play in the half. Marcos Knight capped the run with

a three-point play of his own.
- Vanderbilt's Kyle Fuller scored the Commodores' first five points.
- A Kedren Johnson jumper at the 14:16 mark sparked a 12-0 Vanderbilt run, putting the Commodores in the lead 17-12 with 8:51 remaining in the half.
- Torin Walker's dunk at the 7:38 mark started a 13-5 Blue Raiders run, capped off by a Kerry Hammonds three-pointer, that put MT in the lead 27-24 with 3:48 left to play in the half. Hammonds scored all eight of his first-half points during that stretch of 3:06.
- Bruce Massey scored MT's last four points of the first half to tie the score 31-31. He finished the half with 11 points, scoring in double-figures for the first time since putting up 20 at Tennessee in the NIT last season.

SECOND HALF

- Vanderbilt opened the second half on an 11-4 run, taking a 42-35 lead with 16:11 to play in the game. Rod Odom had five points to start the half for the Commodores.
- Blue Raiders opened the second half 4-for-12 from the field with four different players making a basket (Massey, M. Knight, S. Jones, T. Knight).
- The Blue Raiders held Vanderbilt without a basket from 9:57 to 1:55, a stretch of 8:02. Bruce Massey made back-to-back baskets to start an 11-1 run to give MT a 51-50 lead with 3:32 to play. Raymond Cintron's layup put MT in front.
- Kedren Johnson put Vanderbilt back in the lead with a jumper at the 1:55 mark, giving the Commodores a 52-51 lead. That was Vanderbilt's last basket of the game.
- Tweety Knight's layup, assisted by Marcos Knight, gave the Blue Raiders a 53-52 lead with 1:08 to play. Kerry Hammonds then stole a pass from Vanderbilt's Kedren Johnson on the Commodores next possession and scored to give MT a 55-52 lead with 31 seconds remaining.
- MT held Vanderbilt to one made field goal over the last 9:57 of the game (1 for 9).

MT POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 9-3
- MT defeated Vanderbilt for the first time since Feb. 1, 1995 when the Blue Raiders won 93-90 in overtime
- Vanderbilt leads the series, 29-5
- MT has defeated four of its last six SEC opponents
- Bruce Massey hit his first 3-pointer of the season
- Massey's seven field goals are a career-high
- Massey also had his first double-figure scoring performance since tallying 20 points at Tennessee in the second round of the NIT, finishing with 17 points
- Massey became the eighth different Blue Raider to score double figures in a game this season
- Massey's last three double-figure scoring performances have been against SEC opponents
- 12/21/12 vs. Vanderbilt - 17 points
- 3/19/12 at Tennessee - 20 points
- 1/28/12 at Vanderbilt - 10 points

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis

Opening Statement...
"I'll start off by saying how proud I am of our team. It looked like we were kind of out of it. We went

small with some minutes to go. We went with four guards to try to create some pressure and havoc defensively. We tried to spread it out and tried to drive them. I think that helped. I have so much respect for Kevin (Stallings) and Vanderbilt. I think they played extremely hard. They are tough to guard. They guarded us the right way. This is a great win for our team. We hung in there. Our bench played great. Kerry Hammonds came off the bench and was just fabulous. He helped us beat Ole Miss a couple of weeks ago. I think Bruce (Massey) led us in scoring with 17. It was a great overall win against a really good SEC team."

On Friday's win over Vanderbilt...
"I think it speaks volumes for the strides that we have made for this program. It speaks volume for our fan base that came out on a holiday. I bet there were almost 2,000 students that came on a holiday break. That's hard to do anywhere in America, much less on a neutral court. These things factor in with programs building. We think we've got high major players with high major character. These wins aren't easy at all. I think our team is built from a physical standpoint to be competitive with these teams."

On why he substituted for Bruce Massey late in the game...
"I saw Bruce get tired. I don't think there is a better guard in the SEC right now than (Kedren Johnson). He's played like that in all the tapes I've watched during the past five games. (Bruce) got physically tired. I think Tweety (Knight) fresh gave us another physical guard. It was nothing about matchups. I thought Bruce was tired. Those guards were getting tired, too. Kedren Johnson made a lot of plays through the whole game."

On if his team's confidence is the reason for their recent success...
"I think there is no question that our team keeps playing with confidence. Last year we beat UT with a 15-0 run to win. Tonight, I think it was 16-3 at the end. I think our team just has toughness. They play with an air of confidence. It's not arrogance by any means. I think the practice is what builds our teams by how physical it is and how they go after it each day."

On the final few minutes of the game...
"It wasn't very pretty. We had plenty of time and a number of possessions. That's why we went small. We took our four man out and put Marcos (Knight) at the four to try to create more turnovers. We were trying to drive it at the rim."

On what the Vanderbilt win means for the program...
"You are beating the defending SEC tournament champions. I know they lost some players. They are going to win a number of SEC games. I think in the long run you hope it pays off in recruiting. I think the biggest thing is for our students and fan base, to keep hooking them and come in better numbers after the break. Those are big wins over UCLA, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Ole Miss and Vanderbilt -- that's a lot of BCS wins for our group. I hope our student body can feel proud about that."

Junior forward Kerry Hammonds

On if his big play at Ole Miss helped him in tonight's win over Vanderbilt...
"It helps getting confidence out of the game. As many reps as we get in practice and as many games we were in last year, I just look at every game the same."

On what the win over Vanderbilt means to him...

"It means a lot to me personally and to the program also. I don't remember the last time MT beat Vanderbilt. I know I haven't been a part of it. This is a really big win for us."

Senior guard Bruce Massey, Jr.

On why he has played so well against SEC competition...
"When I'm playing against big schools like SEC teams, they scout me, but they don't really guard me. Like Coach (Kermit Davis) tells me every day in practice, be smart look for your break and also make plays for others."

On what the win over Vanderbilt means to him...
"It means a lot to me. I can say so after playing them for the first time last year and losing a close one at their place. Tonight's win means a lot to our team and to the program. You can tell the fans really appreciate a win like this. Beating a team like Vandy at this point will help us get a lot more fan support going into conference play."

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