

Jones, Knight power Blue Raiders to win over FIU

Jones and Knight each score 15 to lead MT

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[Box Score \(PDF\)](#)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Led by 15 points apiece from Shawn Jones and Marcos Knight, Middle Tennessee defeated the FIU Panthers 69-52 at Murphy Center Saturday night. The victory was head coach Kermit Davis' 100th career Sun Belt win.

Jones added 13 rebounds, tying a career-high, for his third double-double of the season. Knight also had a season-high in rebounds with nine. Raymond Cintron tallied 12 points off the bench on four three-pointers. The Blue Raiders (10-3, 2-0 Sun Belt) shot 43.4% from the field on Saturday, holding FIU (4-7, 1-3 SBC) to 38.8%. MT dominated the glass, out-rebounding the Panthers, 43-27, and scoring 10 points off 15 offensive rebounds.



MT opened the game on a 10-0 run over the first 4:29 and never trailed throughout the contest. Neiko Hunter scored seven of those points. The Blue Raiders took their largest lead of the half at the 6:55 mark as a Bruce Massey free throw put MT up by 14, 22-8. FIU responded with a 9-2 run over the next 2:01 with a Malik Smith three-pointer getting the Panthers within seven at 24-17.

The Blue Raiders got the lead back in double figures on an alley-oop dunk by Jones from Marcos Knight at the 3:04 mark that made the score 28-17. FIU scored the last four points of the opening stanza to get back within seven, 28-21, at halftime.

The Panthers cut the deficit to three points early in the second half, as a Tola Akomolafe jumper made the score 30-27. Jones then knocked down a baseline jumper to start another 10-0 MT run, this one capped off by a Marcos Knight three-point play to put the Blue Raiders ahead by 13, 40-27, with 14:44 to play in the game. FIU only got as close as eight points the rest of the way as MT led by as many as 18 with 52 seconds to play.

The Blue Raiders close out the 2012 calendar year on Monday, Dec. 31 with a 7 p.m. game against North Texas at the Murphy Center. The game will be televised by ESPNU.

FIRST HALF

- MT used its eighth different starting lineup this season (Bruce Massey, Marcos Knight, Kerry Hammonds, Shawn Jones, JT Sulton).
- The Blue Raiders opened the game on a 10-0 run, with Neiko Hunter scoring all seven of his first-half points in that spurt.
- FIU started the game 0-for-8 from the field, getting its first basket on a Marco Porcher Jimenez three-pointer at the 14:39 mark.
- MT made its first three shots from the field despite not having a field goal attempt for the first 2:12 of the game.
- Back-to-back Shawn Jones baskets started a 12-5 MT run over 7:44, with a Bruce Massey free throw giving the Blue Raiders a 22-8 lead with 6:55 remaining in the half. The 14-point advantage was MT's largest of the half.
- Marcos Knight and Shawn Jones connected on an alley-oop at the 3:04 mark, making the score 28-17.
- The Blue Raiders had assists on eight of its nine field goals in the first half.

SECOND HALF

- FIU cut the MT lead to three, 30-27, on a Tola Akomolafe jumper at the 17:42 mark of the second half.
- A Shawn Jones baseline jumper with 16:53 to play started a 10-0 Blue Raiders run over 2:58. Bruce Massey and Neiko Hunter connected for an alley-oop in transition at the 15:06 mark, giving the Blue Raiders a double-digit lead 37-27. Marcos Knight capped off the run with a three-point play, giving MT a 40-27 lead.
- Marcos Knight scored eight straight MT points in the second half.
- JT Sulton set a new season-high with six free throws, making his sixth with 16:26 to play in the game. He was perfect from the foul line Saturday night.
- FIU closed to within eight points, 52-44, with 8:13 to play. MT closed the game on a 17-8 run to win 69-52. The Panthers did not make a field goal over the last 4:22 of the game. Cintron and Jones combined to score 12 of the Blue Raiders' last 17 points.

POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 10-3 overall and 2-0 in the Sun Belt.
- MT has now won seven straight games over FIU dating back to Feb. 25, 2010.
- MT has won three straight and five of its last six.
- MT remains undefeated at home with a 7-0 mark, including the Dec. 21 win over Vanderbilt at Bridgestone Arena.
- MT is now 21-2 at Murphy Center over the past two seasons and has won 19 straight regular-season contests in Murphy Center.
- MT has now reached the 10-win mark before the new year for two straight seasons.
- MT has won six of the last seven Sun Belt regular-season games, dating back to Feb. 9, 2011.
- MT has started 2-0 in the Sun Belt in back-to-back seasons and four of the last five years.
- MT is now 7-0 when leading at halftime.

- Marcos Knight scored double-figures for the 10th time this season and second time in the last three games with 15 points. 13 of his points came in the second half. Knight has been MT's leading scorer four times this season.
- Shawn Jones got his third double-double of the season with 15 points and 13 rebounds, matching his career high. It marked the fourth double-double of his career. It also marked the sixth time this year Jones has scored double figures and second time in the last three games.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

Opening statement...

"Give FIU a lot of credit. We're usually really good against the press. Teams can't press against us because we can attack it, take care of it, and score easy baskets. We did pretty good early on. They made some good adjustments in their press and played extremely hard. I don't know the last time we had 25 turnovers, but we out-rebounded them by 16 and held them under 39 percent from the field. I thought we got great play out of Marcos Knight and Shawn Jones tonight. Any conference win is a really good win. That team makes it tough to play against them with the extended defenses and zones."

On how turnovers affected MT tonight...

"We guarded our tail off in the first half. We blocked shots and drew a number of charges. We just couldn't get shots at the goal. There were also some unforced turnovers in the first half. We had to guard and rebound like that tonight with the way we took care of the ball."

On the seven-day layoff since the Vanderbilt game...

"It's not an easy thing to do. I remember last year we played FIU at home and won by five. That game was right down to the wire. FIU had played at Western Kentucky. I almost think that was an advantage. They got their team back in and played. I thought we practiced well. I couldn't fault how we guarded. We had 18 assists, but our goal is to be plus-7 or plus-8 assists to turnovers and tonight we were minus-7."

On 100 career Sun Belt wins...

"I didn't know it until a little while ago. First, thank you for 11 years and being able to coach at a really good place. There have been a lot of really good coaches in the Sun Belt throughout the years. It's a privilege to be mentioned with those guys."

On Monday night's game against North Texas...

"Obviously, they're a very talented team. I've watched tape of games that they've played really, really well in. I know it'll be a great game in Bowling Green tonight. We had a great game against them last year at their place with a lot of the same players. Tony Mitchell's a great player and they have other great Sun Belt players around him. We'll have to be at our very best Monday night."

Senior Guard Marcos Knight

On team's performance...

"I think we played very well. We had some really good practices this week. I think we came out with a lot of energy in the first half, but we need to have fewer turnovers. Any win in the Sun Belt is equal, and we are 2-0, and we are happy to be 2-0."

On being part of head coach Kermit Davis' 100th conference victory...

"It's a great honor for Coach Davis, and we are happy to be a part of it. Coach Davis deserves it. We

work hard every day and he works hard every day."

On quick turn-around to face North Texas...

"We are going to take it like we take every Sun Belt Conference game. No game is more important than another one, but North Texas is a great team and we need to have great preparation tomorrow. It's a quick turn-around. We have to watch film, watch the edit tape and go over their scouting in practice tomorrow."

Junior Forward Shawn Jones

On handling FIU's pressure...

"We handled the press pretty well. They got us a couple of times when they sped us up and made us make quick decisions, but at the end we ended up figuring out and beating the press."

On letting FIU off the hook in the first half...

"We were in a position to put them away early, but the press gave us a bit of a headache early and we turned the ball over. In the second half though, we were able to put them away."

On getting rebounds...

"Coach Davis told me to make that be one of my biggest things in the game and that when I'm getting rebounds, I'm playing well. I'm just doing my best to help the team get wins."

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