

Blue Raiders send 2012 out in style with win over North Texas

MT remains undefeated at home, in Sun Belt

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

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

The Blue Raider men's basketball team moved to 3-0 in the Sun Belt on New Year's Eve with a 75-57 win over North Texas at Murphy Center. Middle Tennessee held the Mean Green to 33.9 percent shooting from the field while shooting 50 percent.

The Blue Raiders also remained undefeated at home with an 8-0 record and have won 20 straight regular-season home games at Murphy Center.



Six players scored at least eight points for the Blue Raiders (11-3, 3-0 SBC) against the preseason favorite to win the Sun Belt's West Division in North Texas (5-9, 0-3 SBC). Marcos Knight led MT with 12 points, 10 of which came in the second half. He also had a team-high seven rebounds. Raymond Cintron made three 3-pointers on his way to 11 points. Shawn Jones and Neiko Hunter each added nine points as Bruce Massey and Tweety Knight each had eight points. MT out-rebounded North Texas 42-33 and committed only nine turnovers.

Middle Tennessee held North Texas to 1-for-15 from the field to start the game, taking a 15-4 lead on the strength of six points by Tweety Knight and four points from Massey. The Blue Raiders' advantage grew to 15 at the 5:20 mark of the first half on a Marcos Knight layup, making the score 29-14. Cintron gave the Blue Raiders their largest lead of the half when his second three-pointer gave MT a 37-19 advantage with 1:23 to play. North Texas, however, scored the last five points of the half to cut the margin to 13 at 37-24.

The Mean Green opened the second half on a 7-0 run less than two minutes in to get within six, 37-31. North Texas was within eight points with 15:33 to play when a Massey basket started a 17-4 Blue Raider run over the next 7:15. Hunter scored seven points during that stretch as a Tweety Knight layup capped off the run, giving MT a 61-40 lead with 8:18 to play. The Blue Raiders led by as much as 22 points before the game was over.

The Blue Raiders begin a weekend road trip on Thursday, Jan. 3 with a 7:05 game at Arkansas State.

FIRST HALF

- MT held North Texas to 1-for-15 to start the game (span of 11:32). The Blue Raiders opened the game on a 7-2 run highlighted by a Kerry Hammonds 3-pointer.
- Three Tweety Knight layups highlighted a 14-3 Blue Raiders run over 8:19 that put MT ahead 21-6.
- Shawn Jones scored the first six points in an 8-4 MT run that gave the Blue Raiders a 29-14 lead with 5:20 to play in the half.
- Raymond Cintron's second three of the half gave MT its largest lead of the first half, 37-19, with 1:23 to play.
- The Blue Raiders held North Texas to 18.3% shooting from the field in the first half. The Mean Green had just five made field goals in the half. Conversely, MT shot 51.9% from the field in the first half.
- MT had overtly balanced scoring in the first half. Raymond Cintron led the Blue Raiders with eight points. Shawn Jones had seven points, with Tweety Knight adding six points. Kerry Hammonds put in five points, Bruce Massey had four, Jacquez Rozier made three free throws, and JT Sulton and Marcos Knight each had two points.

SECOND HALF

- North Texas opened the second half on a 7-0 run to get within six, 37-31, 1:55 into the period. Tony Mitchell had his first two baskets of the game during that spurt with Jacob Holmen adding a three-pointer.
- Cintron's third 3-pointer of the game put the Blue Raiders up by 10, 44-34, with 15:56 to play. He was the first MT player to score in double figures Monday night.
- After a Roger Franklin jumper got North Texas within eight, 44-36, a Bruce Massey jumper started a 17-4 MT run over 7:15. Neiko Hunter scored seven points in the run, including a 3-pointer. Tweety Knight's layup at the 8:18 gave the Blue Raiders their largest lead of the game, 21 points, 61-40.
- Marcos Knight's back-to-back jumpers with 3:09 to play gave him 12 points for the game and put MT up by 22, 71-49. Knight scored 10 points of 5-of-7 shooting from the field in the second half.
- The Blue Raiders bench outscored the North Texas reserves 16-2 in the second half and 33-11 for the game.
- Twenty-four of MT's 38 points in the second half came in the paint.

POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 11-3 overall and 3-0 in the Sun Belt.
- MT has won four straight and six of its last seven.
- MT has now won four straight games over North Texas, dating back to Jan. 30, 2010.
- MT remains undefeated at home with an 8-0 mark, including the Dec. 21 win over Vanderbilt at Bridgestone Arena.
- MT is now 22-2 at Murphy Center over the past two seasons and has won 20 straight regular-season contests in Murphy Center.

- MT has won seven of the last eight Sun Belt regular-season games, dating back to Feb. 9, 2012.
- MT has started 3-0 in the Sun Belt in back-to-back seasons and three of the last five years.
- MT is now 8-0 when leading at halftime.
- The MT bench out-scored the North Texas bench, 33-11. MT's bench has out-scored its opponent in every game this season.
- MT has not trailed in three of its last four games, including the last two games. MT has not trailed since the 1:09 mark of the Dec. 21 contest vs. Vanderbilt, or the last 41:09. MT's largest deficit in a Sun Belt contest this season is two points vs. Louisiana on Nov. 29. The last time MT trailed in a Sun Belt contest was the 11:09 mark of the second half against Louisiana on Nov. 29.
- MT held North Texas to 18.5 percent shooting in the first half. That is the best field goal percentage defense for the Blue Raiders since Feb. 1, 2007 when MT held Denver to 18.2 percent (4-for-22) in the second half.
- MT also held North Texas to five field goals in the first half, a season-low for an opponent. It was the fewest field goals for an opponent in a half since Arkansas State had five on Jan. 19, 2012 in the second half.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

Opening statement...

"I was really proud of our defensive intensity the entire game. I thought we really guarded on the ball. We flew around and got a lot of 50-50 balls. In the first half, we just fouled them and committed careless reach-in fouls instead of just guarding them. I thought in the second half we did a better job of playing without our hands. We shared the ball a lot better and came from 25 turnovers against FIU to nine tonight. It was a good stat line. We out-rebounded a really good rebounding team by nine, 18-to-9 assists to turnovers, and shot over 50 percent."

On defending North Texas' Tony Mitchell...

"I thought Shawn Jones competed well, as did everyone that had a chance to guard him. We didn't really double-team him that much. He's such an outstanding offensive rebounder, he had seven. He just seems like he can go get it. I think those guys, in those kind of games with their talent level, I think just the normal cat who loves basketball will compete at a higher level. Jacques Rozier had him a little bit and was physical with him. That was kind of our plan. You're not going to shut him down, but I just thought we could throw out a number of guys at him throughout the game. The best way to defend him is to pressure the ball and really push the offense out."

On Neiko Hunter...

"Neiko is our best 4/5 shooter. He can make a three and stretch the defense. He got two quick fouls so he didn't get a lot of chances and opportunities in the first half, but he gave us a really nice lift shooting the ball and making plays."

On winning 20 consecutive regular-season games at Murphy Center...

"That's quite a feat. We have been a good home team and we've played extremely well at home. We just have to continue to go game-to-game and just keep playing and improve in practice. We've been a really good defensive team at home especially. We really haven't talked about big picture stuff very much. With the returning players we have, we just set goals about practice and just trying to get to the first four minutes. I think when you have a veteran team and they've won and the expectations are where they are, I just think you just try to go day to day and half to half."

On Marcos Knight...

"He's such a competitive guy. He got upset at a timeout. I got on him about getting a foul, but it's in his good competitive way. I get that and I understand that from tough guys, because sometimes I can overreact too. I'm kind of like Marcos in some ways. I appreciate it. There is no tougher guy in college basketball, pound for pound, than him. He just makes winning plays and takes everything personally. He's playing like he's maybe the player of the year in the league right now."

Junior Guard Raymond Cintron

On whether playing on T.V. changes style of play...

"We're not going to change anything as a team; we're going to play our game. It's always nice to play on TV and let people know what we're capable of."

On winning 20 games at home (regular season)...

"It's always a pleasure to play in a front of a crowd like that. At home, you don't want to lose. You want to defend the house."

On North Texas' aggressive play...

"We knew they were going to come out hard. We've just got to keep playing our identity. Get some stops and keep playing together."

On teams hot play recently...

"We still have to get better. We still have to work a lot of things on our team. We know we aren't at our best yet. We just go day-by-day, work hard every day. We take them one by one and we'll see what happens from there."

Junior Forward Shawn Jones

On 20 straight regular-season home wins...

"We just try to take care of home court. We just try to go into our games and tell our teammates to not lose at home. We want to protect our house."

On the team's focus regarding Tony Mitchell...

"It was a big emphasis coming in to tonight: make sure we defend him well because he's basically the key to the team. I'd say we did good, except that little spurt he had in the first half."

On defending Tony Mitchell...

"I just went in and tried to stick to the game plan. I tried my hardest to stop him on the offensive end."

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