Second-half surge lifts Blue Raiders to win over South Alabama

MT in first place in the Sun Belt East

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Box Score (PDF)

MOBILE, Ala. - A second-half surge and a pair of late free throws from Bruce Massey sealed Middle Tennessee's 60-56 victory over South Alabama on Saturday night at Mitchell Center.

Nine Blue Raiders (12-4, 4-1 Sun Belt) scored in the contest, led by Massey's 12 points. Shawn Jones also cracked double-figure scoring with 11 points. Neiko Hunter chipped in nine points, while Marcos Knight and James Gallman each added six. Knight and Kerry Hammonds led the Blue Raiders on the boards with seven rebounds each.

MT shot 42.6 percent from the field and held South Alabama (7-7, 4-2 SBC) to 37 percent shooting. The two teams matched each other with 37 rebounds, but the Blue Raiders held the advantage in bench points (25-19), points in the paint (32-20), and had just nine turnovers while forcing 11.

The Blue Raiders held a one-point advantage at halftime thanks to JT Sulton's steal with 22 seconds left and layup at the opposite end to make it 29-28. MT carried that momentum into the second stanza, opening the frame on an 11-2 run.

The onslaught continued, as MT built up a 15-point lead with 10:14 to play. The Blue Raiders widened the gap on an 8-0 run, led by Massey and Hunter with four points apiece.

The Jaguars responded with a 12-3 run to cut MT's lead to six with 5:38 remaining, but another Massey layup sparked a 5-0 spurt that put the lead back in double figures at 58-47. South Alabama trimmed the lead to two with 1:41 to play on a 9-0 run, but Massey came up with a crucial offensive rebound with 22 seconds remaining forcing the Jaguars to foul. Massey hit both of the ensuing free throws and the Jaguars missed their final two shots as MT earned the four-point victory.

Mychal Ammons led South Alabama with 15 points and Freddie Goldstein had 12. Augustine Rubit posted a double-double with 10 points and 14 rebounds, while Javier Carter also added 10 points.

The Blue Raiders return home to host Florida Atlantic on Thursday. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT at Murphy Center.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

Opening statement...
"That stretch in the second half, we played extremely well on both ends to get up 50-35. We had a few guys get tired and subbed, then all of the sudden we had some bad turnovers and got on our heels. We played not to foul, but give South Alabama credit. They were in first place going into tonight and they played extremely hard.

"I like what we did tonight. We've got a lot of room for improvement but that's a really good road win against a team who competed their tail off."

On Bruce Massey's performance...
"I was proud of our players. I was proud of Bruce Massey and the way he competed. Bruce and I talked today. Sometimes family have disagreements. I love Bruce Massey and love coaching him. He's a lot like me, he's pretty dang competitive and we understand all that. I think we learned a valuable lesson and it's good to have him back. That play he made at half court, that was old Bruce Massey."

SENIOR GUARD BRUCE MASSEY

On the win...
"After losing at Arkansas State, you could tell it was devastating. It was just quiet. They out toughed us on their own court, so we knew this was a big game tonight."

On bouncing back after Arkansas State
"I knew tonight was a bounce back game. The good thing about basketball is that you don't have to wait a week to play the next game."

On the grind of conference play...
"In conference play, after awhile everyone knows your tendencies. It just becomes playing basketball. Players have to make plays. Coach makes the game plan but you have to go out and execute."

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