Blue Raiders' 26-0 run leads to win over Florida Atlantic

MT held Owls scoreless for 11 minutes

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Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Powered by a 26-0 run over 11:10, Middle Tennessee defeated the Florida Atlantic Owls 62-52 Thursday night at Murphy Center. Marcos Knight led the Blue Raiders with 13 points, scoring 11 in the second half.

MT opened the game on a 6-0 run, but Florida Atlantic's duo of Greg Gantt and Stefan Moody powered a 22-10 run to give the Owls a 22-16 lead with 8:15 remaining in the half. Florida Atlantic (8-9, 3-3 Sun Belt) led 24-19 with 7:26 to go in the half when a Bruce Massey layup sparked a 16-0 Blue Raiders run that gave MT a 35-24 lead. James Gallman scored five points during the half-ending scoring spurt, including a three-point play at the end of the stanza.

The Blue Raiders (13-4, 5-1 SBC) continued their big run into the second half, scoring the first 10 points as a Raymond Cintron three put MT comfortably in front 45-21. Florida Atlantic cut the deficit to 12 three different times and were as close as eight with 2:38 to play, but a Knight layup with 2:08 remaining sealed the win for the Blue Raiders.

Knight was 6-for-9 from the field Thursday night, adding a game-high five assists. Neiko Hunter scored 12 points, 10 in the first half, and chipped in six rebounds. Massey also had six rebounds to go with 10 points. As a team, MT shot 50 percent from the field, while Florida Atlantic shot 40.5 percent. The Blue Raiders dominated the paint, out-rebounding the Owls, 32-27, and out-scoring them, 34-10, in the lane. Gantt led all scorers with 23 points.

The Blue Raiders are back in action on Saturday, Jan. 12 with a 4 p.m. game at ULM.

FIRST HALF

- MT opened the game on a 6-0 run highlighted by dunks by Shawn Jones and Marcos Knight.
- Greg Gantt and Stefan Moody went on a 11-4 run by themselves to give Florida Atlantic over 4:32 to give Florida Atlantic an 11-10 lead at the 12:45 mark of the half. Gantt had seven points. Each player had 12 first-half points, accounting for all 24 Owls points in the period.
- Neiko Hunter made four consecutive shots from the field after missing his first attempt of the game, scoring eight straight points to get MT within four, 18-14, with 9:45 remaining in the half. Bruce Massey added a fastbreak layup and a three-pointer to move the Blue Raiders to within three, 22-19, with 8:01 to play.
- MT had its first free throw attempts at the 6:07 mark. FAU was 7-for-9 at the line by then.
- Gantt put Florida Atlantic ahead by five, 24-19, with a layup at the 7:26 mark. That was the Owls' last points of the half.
- A Massey layup sparked the Blue Raiders' 16-0 run that ended the first half, giving MT a 35-24 lead. Tweety Knight tied the game 24-24 with a fastbreak layup at the 4:45 mark. Kerry Hammonds put the Blue Raiders in the lead with two foul shots with 3:56 remaining. James Gallman had five points in the run, including a three-point play in the waning seconds of the half.
- The Blue Raiders held the Owls without a field goal for the final 7:26 of the first half. MT also outscored Florida Atlantic 22-2 in the paint.

SECOND HALF

- Kerry Hammonds, Marcos Knight, and Raymond Cintron scored MT's first ten points of the second half, giving the Blue Raiders a 45-24 lead with 16:38 to play.
- Pablo Bertone became the third Owl to score in the game with a three-pointer at the 16:16 mark of the half. His triple ended a 25-0 MT run over 11:10.
- Florida Atlantic cut the deficit to 12, 47-35, with 11:16 to play with a 13-4 run over 6:09 capped off by a Gantt layup.
- MT went on a 9-4 run, highlighted by six points by Marcos Knight, to take a 17-point lead, 58-41, with 5:39 remaining in the game. Knight became the second Blue Raider in double-figure scoring on the evening, scoring 11 points in the second half to give him 13 for the game.
- A Kelvin Penn layup with 5:13 to play sparked a 10-1 Florida Atlantic run. Jackson Trapp capped off the run with a three to make the score 59-51 with 2:38 to play.
- Massey became the third MT player in double-figures when he split a pair of free throws with 4:07 remaining, giving him 10 points for the game.

POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 13-4, 5-1 in the Sun Belt
- MT maintained its lead in the Sun Belt East Division, the only one-loss team in the league
- MT has won 21 straight regular-season home games and is 9-0 in home games this year, including one win at Bridgestone Arena
- MT is one of 21 teams 9-0 or better at home this season
- MT is now 23-2 at Murphy Center over the past two seasons
- MT has held six of its last seven opponents to less than 60 points
- MT is 10-0 when leading at halftime
- Neiko Hunter scored double figures for the fourth time this season with 12 points
- Marcos Knight scored double figures for the 13th time this season with 13 points. Knight has

cracked double figures in four of the last five games
- Bruce Massey scored double figures for the third time this season with 10 points and has cracked double-figure scoring in back-to-back games

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS
"I thought we had some real positive parts of that game. I thought in the first five minutes we played extremely hard and got in transition. We went to our bench and the game flip-flopped. We got down by six. I brought the starters back in and got stabilized. In the last six or seven minutes, I thought the guys off the bench played really well. We had good play from James Gallman, Torin Walker, and Jason Jones. They were the ones that got us to that 11-point lead.

"We started the second half great, but we went through spells of not scoring. We were up 45-24 and Raymond Cintron missed some wide open looks. I thought Torin Walker gave us some decent minutes tonight. Greg Gantt is a really good player. He's scoring in so many different ways. We tried a lot of people on him and he spun toward the goal and made threes. He's a much improved player."

On the 26-0 run midway through the game...
"That was great basketball for us. We went up 45-24 and then we just kind of stopped. We went to our bench again and we stopped scoring. We really didn't get anything in the paint and we couldn't really get to the foul line during that time. I'm pleased with our defense, but we've got to become a better offensive team."

On holding Greg Gantt and Stefan Moody scoreless for over 11 minutes...
"I really thought they got tired at the end in the first half. Our depth wore on them a little bit. When those guys are fresh, they're good. Moody is one of the top scoring freshmen in college basketball. He's averaging 15 a game as a freshman. He's a handful. He's athletic and they got going in the second half and cut it to eight."

On holding down Florida Atlantic's top-three scorers...
"They're one, two, and three score the most points of any 1-2-3 in the league in Sun Belt play. We did a good job on Pablo Bertone in getting a hand up on his shots. Their inside guys, based on their numbers, know their roles. They guard, rebound, and put it back in goal but they're not trying to manufacture out of the post. If you get those three stopped, you're going to win the game. That's why we got up so big in the game, and then we couldn't get them stopped and they got back in the game."

Senior guard Marcos Knight
On not being satisfied with the 10-point victory...
"We didn't finish the game like we were supposed to, and Coach Davis is going to be upset about that. At the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half, we played really good defense, but when the game went on we kind of laid back on the defensive end. We understand where he is coming from and we need to learn to put 40 minutes together."

On how the team did defending FAU's Gantt...
"He's a scorer, he's going to get his shots. Sometimes you just can't stop a scorer, so maybe you need to just limit his touches. You've got to make him take hard shots."

On big plays down the stretch...
"Coach Davis always talks to us about toughness. He talks about executing plays. I hate losing, so I

started trying to make plays for my team."

On mindset late in the game...
"The whole team, we talk about toughness. In order to win games, you have to be tough defensively and offensively. I've always been kind of tough, but Coach Davis has really instilled it in me."

On being 6'2" but still going hard into the lane...
"It's just a mindset. Size doesn't matter, you know. I listen a lot to Ray Lewis and about how everyone thought he was always too small. I think I've got a heart of a giant-I'm not afraid to go inside."

Junior forward Neiko Hunter
On play improving...
" I feel myself working hard in practice, and finishing and catching tough passes and things."

On his growing role...
"I feel myself getting better. It has a lot to do with team chemistry, so I can feel myself getting back to the team chemistry thing. I feel pretty good about it."

On how not being the "go-to guy" changes his game...
"It pretty much makes it easier. I've got a lot of guys that can score on the team. I just get my few touches and try to score on the rebounds."

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