Blue Raiders grind out win over ULM

Knight scores 17 to lead MT

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Box Score (PDF)

MONROE, La. - Middle Tennessee earned its seventh win in the last eight games, grinding out a 66-57 victory over the ULM Warhawks on Saturday evening at Fant-Ewing Coliseum.

Marcos Knight paced the Blue Raiders (14-4, 6-1 Sun Belt) with 17 points and nine rebounds, while Bruce Massey added 12 points, including an 8-for-8 performance at the line. Knight also dished out five assists and had three steals, with Massey chipping in three assists. JT Sulton led MT on the boards with 10 rebounds and also tallied eight points. Neiko Hunter added nine points and Torin Walker scored a career-high eight points.

The Blue Raiders never trailed in the contest, but did not pull away until late in the first half. Leading 16-12 with 9:47 to go in the early stanza, Walker knocked down a pair of free throws to spark a 14-2 run over the next six minutes. MT held the Warhawks (3-10, 2-5 SBC) without a field goal for more than seven minutes during the spurt and built up a 16-point lead, the largest of the game, at 30-14.

MT took a 34-19 lead into halftime, but ULM responded in the second half, going 11-for-13 from the field to start the frame. The Warhawks worked the deficit down to two with 11 minutes to play after limiting the Blue Raiders to one field goal in five minutes, but Massey sank a couple of free throws to make it a four-point cushion.

A triple from Hunter, the only of the contest for the Blue Raiders, pushed MT's lead back to 10 with 5:44 remaining and the Warhawks never got closer than seven the rest of the way.

The Blue Raiders finished the contest shooting 43.1 percent compared to ULM's 40 percent. Free throws proved crucial, as MT hit 80.8 percent from the stripe. The Blue Raiders also out-rebounded the Warhawks, 40-22, and owned an 18-6 advantage in bench production.

MT returns home for three of the next four contests, beginning with UALR on Thursday. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m. CT at Murphy Center.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

"We withstood their tenacity and competitiveness and ended the first half on a good note, but just had no energy in the second half defensively. Proud of how we caught our breath, though. It was an ugly road win, but we'll take it and move on."

On individual performances...

"It was great to see JT get 10 rebounds, eight points and make some good plays at the end. I thought Bruce Massey and Marcos Knight led our team well. (Torin) is getting close to beating Shawn (Jones) out. Shawn isn't playing at a level we need him to play, so maybe coming off the bench will help him. We have a lot of faith in Shawn, but maybe that will help him. But I was really proud of Torin, especially in the first half."

JUNIOR CENTER TORIN WALKER On tonight's win...

"ULM was a very good team and they gave us a good test today. We have to get better on offense, but we're guarding well on defense. We have lulls, particularly in the second half."

On withstanding ULM's run...

"I credit a lot of that to Coach Davis, just being a good coach. We practice a lot for situations, being down by two or up by two. I also credit a lot to last year's team. Winning 27 games last year helped us a lot with situations like that."

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