Blue Raiders collect 10th-straight win with victory over Arkansas State

M. Knight registers double-double, Hunter scores career-best 17

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Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee used a 20-4 run at the start of the second half en route to knocking off Arkansas State, 73-60, inside the Murphy Center on Thursday night.

MT (21-4, 13-1 SBC) has now won 25 straight regular-season home games and ran its winning streak to 10 games, while head coach Kermit Davis tied Gene Bartow for second on the Sun Belt's list of winningest coaches with his 111th league victory.

Marcos Knight scored 15 points and had 11 rebounds for his first double-double of the season and second of his career, while Neiko Hunter registered a career-high 17 points.

MT led by as many as 31, out-scoring ASU 44-20 in the paint and 34-26 off the bench. Offensively, the Blue Raiders shot 53.6 percent in the game while limiting ASU (14-9, 8-6 SBC) to 36.5 percent shooting.

On the first two offensive possessions of the game, Knight and Bruce Massey hit consecutive three pointers to put MT up 6-0 and set the tone for the remainder of the game. The Blue Raiders started the contest on a 12-1 run and didn't allow an ASU field goal for the opening 4:05. Massey's steal at mid-court and layup at the other end capped the spurt.

The Red Wolves only managed to get as close as seven the rest of the way in the first frame in a game where the Blue Raiders led throughout. MT connected on 56 percent of their field goals in the first half to lead 34-21 at intermission.

The Blue Raiders stormed out of the break and more than doubled their lead in the first five minutes

of the second half, jumping out to a 27-point advantage on a 16-2 run. Additionally, the Blue Raiders held the Red Wolves without a field goal for over nine minutes as ASU went 0-for-9 to start the second stanza.

Middle Tennessee is back in the Glass House on Saturday, Feb. 9, to take on Troy. Tip-off is scheduled for 5 p.m.

FIRST HALF

- Marcos Knight and Bruce Massey hit consecutive three-pointers on the first two possessions
- Blue Raiders started the game on a 12-1 run and didn't allow an ASU field goal for opening 4:05
- At the 3:27 mark, ASU's Ed Townsel missed a jumper, starting a scramble of plays that included three missed shots, three offensive rebounds and a fast break layup for James Gallman that lasted just 23 seconds.
- MT hit 56 percent of its field goals in the half. They've now shot at least 50 percent in the first half six different times.
- Final shot of the half was a baseline three-pointer by Kerry Hammonds, his lone three-pointer of the game.

SECOND HALF

- Blue Raiders more than doubled their lead in the opening five minutes of the second half, jumping out to a 27-point advantage on a 16-2 run.
- Including the final 22 seconds of the first half, MT outscored ASU 23-4 over a span of 9:05.
- ASU was held without a field goal until 11:38 of the second half.
- Neiko Hunter's three-pointer with 6:50 remaining tied his career-high of 15 points. He finished the game with a career-high 17 points.
- Marcos Knight recorded his first double-double of the season after grabbing his tenth rebound with 9:38 remaining.
- Nine Blue Raiders saw double-digit minutes, and 10 Blue Raiders made an impact on the scoreboard.

POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 21-4 and 13-1 in Sun Belt play. The 13 league wins are one shy of the school-record 14 set last season.
- MT has won 10 straight games and 14 of its last 15.
- Kermit Davis registered his 111th Sun Belt win, tying Gene Bartow for second among the league's all-time winningest coaches. He needs one win to match Ronnie Arrow as the league's all-time winningest coach.
- MT is now 13-0 at home this season and 27-2 over the past two years in Murphy Center.
- MT has won 25 straight regular-season home games.
- MT has held five of its last seven opponents to 60 points or less and 12 of the last 15.
- The 10-game winning streak is tied for the fifth-longest in program history.
- MT is 17-0 when leading at halftime.
- Marcos Knight's 15 points marked his fifth-straight double-figure scoring performance and 20th this season. He also had the second double-double of his career with 1 rebounds, the

last coming on Nov. 20, 2011 against Belmont.

- Neiko Hunter scored double figures for the eighth time this season with a career-high 17 points
- MT held ASU without a field goal for an 8:22 stretch to start the second half, with the Red Wolves starting the latter frame 0-for-9

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

"I have to say that really for about 32 or 33 minutes, we played with a great energy level, played with a great unselfishness tonight. I thought in the second half the way we started it defensively, and then their missed shots led to open floor baskets. I thought we really shared the ball against a team that is playing really good; a team that is obviously very well-coached, physical, and mature. I hate that it kind of ended the way it did, but give them credit. They started driving the ball and made plays the last six or seven minutes, but a really good effort on our part tonight."

On scoring runs...
"It's just an energy and physicalness. We got in the open floor so much at the start of the second half. We got in transition and then that's where we're good. Our defense led to offense, we rebounded the ball better in that period of time, and I thought we just shared the ball great. The ball just moved, we got easy layups, and it was fun to watch our team play like that. Then we kind of got in a rut. We started missing a few shots and stopped guarding. But I think it's just who we are, and we played well to start both halves."

On Marcos Knight...
"He was great. I thought his energy level was good, he really shared the ball. Even at the second half the play he made to JT Sulton, kind of a set play at halftime. When he rebounds the ball like that, he's the best player in our league. He got all of his toughness and all of his great intangibles into the game."

Marcos Knight on whether they look at the standings before a game:
"We count every conference game the same. Coach Davis puts their record up on the board and they say this is a really big game for us, but we don't look at any game being bigger than any other game. We just go out there and just play hard like we always do."

Knight on whether they do the math for wins to reach the regular season title:
"We just take it one game at a time. We are not trying to get ahead of ourselves. We just try and get better every day. We do want to be the regular season champ. That's our main goal besides getting to the NCAA tournament, but we just take it one game at a time."

Neiko Hunter on how he balances wanting to score and not stepping on anyone's toes:
"I just play off my players. Whatever they do, I try and clean up, be one of the dirty men like Marcos is, so I just play off the team."

Hunter on what led to such good starts in both halves:
"We try to do that every day. We try to come out every day playing defense. It starts off in practice though. We had two great days of practice, and it just led over in the game."

Knight on whether there was a chip on their shoulders after losing last time:
"No not at all. They beat us. We weren't ready to play. That's why they beat us. That's one thing we talked to each other about was let's be ready to play tonight. It's not a revenge game. We take every

game the same. It's not a revenge game at all."

Knight on the defensive mentality coming out of halftime:
"We talk about the first five minutes of the second half a lot. We have to play defense to have a good offensive night, and that is something we take pride in - to play great team defense. They have a lot great scorers, but you can't stop just one guy one on one. You have to have a team effort to stop all their great scorers. They have a lot of great scorers. We came together as a team and stopped those guys tonight."

Marcos on a rough night at the free throw line:
"That isn't like me, he knows something was wrong, I jammed my finger but that is no excuse, I'll get better at it though."

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