Davis becomes Sun Belt's all-time winningest coach with win over UALR

Head coach has 113 league victories

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Box Score (PDF)

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Blue Raider men's basketball head coach Kermit Davis became the Sun Belt's all-time winningest coach with Middle Tennessee's 66-61 victory over UALR on Saturday night at the Jack Stephens Center. Davis has 113 league wins, surpassing Ronnie Arrow's (South Alabama) mark of 112.

MT (23-4, 15-1 SBC) reeled off its 12th consecutive win, tying the fourth-longest streak in program history, and won its 16th in the last 17. The Blue Raiders also broke the school record for conference victories with their 15th, surpassing the mark of 14 set last year.

Marcos Knight led four Blue Raiders in double-figure scoring with 15 points. Bruce Massey and Raymond Cintron scored 11 apiece and Kerry Hammonds tallied 10 points while matching JT Sulton with a team-high seven rebounds.

MT's defense set the tone from the outset, allowing the Trojans (15-12, 9-7 SBC) just six field goals in the early stanza. The Blue Raiders limited UALR to one field goal in a 12-minutes span while building up a 12-point lead with five minutes to go before the break. It was Torin Walker's pair of free throws five minutes into the contest that gave MT a 7-6 lead, and the Blue Raiders never trailed in the remainder of the contest.

Hammonds and Massey led the first-half charge, scoring eight and seven points, respectively. MT took a 28-18 lead into the break.

The Blue Raiders maintained a double-figure lead until the 12:21 mark when the Trojans managed to cut it to nine on a Michael Javes jumper. Javes and Ben Dillard each had 12 points to lead the Trojans.

A bucket from JT Sulton pushed the lead back to double digits and the Blue Raiders would stretch it to as many as 15 on a Neiko Hunter layup with 10 minutes remaining.

The Trojans rallied late in the contest, trimming the lead to four at the 1:17 mark thanks to a 10-2

run. But free throws became crucial for MT and the Blue Raiders answered the call, knocking down 10 straight in the final 2:52 to seal the win. Cintron sank eight consecutive free throws, including two in the final two seconds to turn a three-point lead into a five-point cushion. Knight also hit two and had a slam with 29 seconds remaining to help the Blue Raiders hold on to the five-point victory.

MT returns home for its final two home games of the season, beginning with South Alabama on Thursday at 7 p.m.

POSTGAME NOTES

- MT is now 23-4 and 15-1 in Sun Belt play. The 15 league wins are a school record, surpassing the record of 14 from last season.
- MT has won 12 straight games, tying the fourth-longest streak in program history, and 16 of its last 17.
- Kermit Davis registered his 113th Sun Belt win, becoming the league's all-time winningest coach as he passed Ronnie Arrow's mark of 112.
- MT has had at least four players score double-figures in a game eight times this season.
- MT held UALR to 18 points in the first half, the second straight game and fourth time this year an opponent has scored less than 20 in the first half.

HEAD COACH KERMIT DAVIS

On the win...
"It was a good road win. It wasn't pretty at all, but we did what we had to do. Probably the biggest positive was that we made late-game free throws."

On the first half...
"I thought we guarded really well in the first half. But we guarded ourselves and wouldn't move the ball. We dribbled it way too much. Give Little Rock credit though. We knew how they would compete."

On the toughness of the team...
"We list the strengths of our team and number one is edge and toughness. Number two is our depth and number three is how we play unselfish. I thought we had an edge, but we didn't really play unselfish. We kind of fought ourselves offensively, but we came up with some big stops and guarded at the right time."

On individual play...
"I thought Kerry Hammonds played really well. He competed with seven rebounds and no turnovers. JT fought to get seven rebounds. Raymond had five rebounds, which was great for him. Marcos didn't have his best game, but led us in scoring and made some critical plays down the stretch."

SENIOR GUARD BRUCE MASSEY
On UALR physicality...
"You know whenever you play UALR it's going to be a physical game. They're a physical team every night. We know coming into the game after (they lost) to Arkansas State, they're still trying to play for first place. So we knew we were going to get their best shot, and they came out with a lot of energy.

On difficulty getting into rhythm...

"It was hard on both teams. They were taking away first shot. It was getting us out of our rhythm, so credit to them for playing physical and making it difficult for us. We were just able to hit late-game free throws down the stretch and get a couple open looks and we hit them."

On maturity of the team...
"That's a credit to Coach Davis, making us mature. I can't say we would've won this game last year. We were all first-year players and weren't as mature as we are this year. We know every game is a must-win game no matter what. Credit to Coach Davis, credit to my teammates for being mature enough to win this game."

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