Klemetz, Jackson Give Blue Raiders 4-3 Win

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's Kirk Jackson overcame losing the first set to win at No. 5, and Daniel Klemetz won a hard-fought, 7-5, 7-5 decision in the final match, to give the 41st-ranked Blue Raiders a 4-3 win over 18th-ranked Alabama in the first round of the NCAA Tournament in Oxford, Miss., at the Palmer/Salloum Tennis Center. The Blue Raiders won the doubles point in the match, but the second-seeded Crimson Tide then won three of the first four singles matches before Jackson evened the match at three with his three-set win. The 14th-ranked Klemetz sealed the victory with a two-hour, two-set win over 53rd-ranked Maxim Belski, giving Middle Tennessee its second victory in NCAA Tournament competition in school history. The Blue Raiders advance to the second round of the NCAA Tournament for only the second time, and the first since defeating Florida International in the first round in 1997 in Gainesville, Fla. The win was also the first for Middle Tennessee over Alabama in postseason play in three tries, as the Crimson Tide eliminated the Blue Raiders in both 1996 and 1997. The Blue Raiders opened by winning the doubles point, albeit because of a default at No. 3 by the Crimson Tide. The 40th-ranked Blue Raider duo of Oliver Foreman and Robert Gustafsson defeated Belski and Stephen Mitchell, 8-4, at No. 1. Then UA's Chris Gostek and Chris McRae defaulted at No. 3 when ahead 5-4 over Trevor Short and Michael Staniak. The default gave the third-seeded Blue Raiders an early 1-0 lead in the match. But the Crimson Tide began strong in singles play, winning the first set in four of the six matches. Christian Broderson won the opening set, 6-3, over Short at No. 6, and McRae went up a set on Kirk Jackson at No. 5 by the same score. Staniak took the opening set of his match at No. 4, 6-2, but then Gostek went up a set over Gustafsson at No. 3 and Foreman fell behind a set to Mitchell at No. 2. In usual style, Klemetz slugged it out with his opponent at No. 1, taking the first set, 7-5, against Belski. Broderson tied the match for the Crimson Tide by finishing off Short 6-2 in the second set, but Staniak gave the Blue Raiders the lead again just minutes later by taking care of Nick Bueque, 6-2, in the second set. Staniak improved to 16-5 this season in dual matches, second on the team only to Klemetz. Jackson evened his match against McRae with a 6-2 second set. The Crimson Tide then took a 3-2 edge with victories at 2 and 3, as Gostak defeated Gustafsson, 6-3, 6-4, while Mitchell

won 6-3, 6-4, over Foreman. Jackson squared the match at three by taking the third set, 6-1, his second victory over McRae this year. The sophomore won 7-6, 6-4, during the fall in the first round of the Omni Hotels Region III Championships in Knoxville, Tenn. The deciding match came down to Klemetz and Belski at No. 1. Klemetz went ahead 4-3 in the third set before Belski evened the match at four and then took the lead at 5-4. But Klemetz tied it again at five before taking the final set 7-5, giving the Blue Raiders the 4-3 win. The win was the first for Middle Tennessee over Alabama since the Blue Raiders defeated the then 33rd-ranked Crimson Tide during the 1997 regular season, 4-3, at the Blue-Gray National Tennis Classic in Montgomery, Ala. The win for Klemetz avenges a 6-7, 3-6, defeat to then 36th-ranked Belski last March during a regular season match in Tuscaloosa, Ala., a 6-1 Crimson Tide team win. "It was an unbelievable match and a terrific effort from our guys to battle and not give up after going down," Blue Raider head coach Dale Short said. "We started well with the doubles point, but Alabama really jumped on us in the singles and had us down early. "But Kirk did a great job in coming back to win in three sets, and Daniel won another hard-fought match that got us the victory. "We'll have to try and regroup quickly to get ready for Ole Miss, who has a terrific team and proved that all season with a great year in the SEC." Middle Tennessee advances to play seventh-ranked and host Ole Miss at noon Sunday. The Blue Raiders and Rebels met during the regular season last year in Oxford, with the then 10th-ranked Rebels taking a 4-3 decision over the Blue Raiders. **#41 MIDDLE TENNESSEE 4, #18 ALABAMA 3**

SINGLES

1. (14) Daniel Klemetz (MT) def. (53) Maxim Belski (UA), 7-5, 7-5
2. Stephen Mitchell (UA) def. Oliver Foreman (MT), 6-3, 6-4
3. Chris Gostek (UA) def. Robert Gustafsson (MT), 6-3, 6-4
4. Michael Staniak (MT) def. Nick Beuque (UA), 6-2, 6-2
5. Kirk Jackson (MT) def. Chris McRae (UA), 3-6, 6-1, 6-2
6. Christian Broderson (UA) def. Trevor Short (MT), 6-3, 6-2

DOUBLES

1. (40) Foreman-Gustafsson (MT) def. Belski-Mitchell (UA), 8-4
2. (51) Klemetz-Jackson (MT) vs. Beuque-William Boyles (UA), DNF
3. Short-Staniak (MT) def. Gostak-McRae (UA), 4-5, default

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