Blue Raiders suffer setback in opener

Fall to No. 24 Tennessee, 83-52

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. - Kermit Davis believes the Tennessee men's basketball team will make several Southeastern Conference teams look bad in Thompson-Boling Arena this season. Middle Tennessee is not a SEC team; however, the Blue Raiders got a first-hand look at the disruption No. 24-ranked Tennessee can create for opposing teams on its home floor during a 83-52 setback in the season opener for both teams in front of 17,798 here Friday night. "Tennessee is a quality basketball team and we knew that coming into the game," Davis said. "A lot of SEC teams are going to come in here and struggle against them this season. They really took us out of our offense throughout the game and made it difficult for us to get into any type of offensive rhythm. I was most disappointed in our inside game tonight. I just did not feel like we competed very well inside but there are some things we can take from this and work to get better." The Blue Raiders shot just 34 percent (17-of-49) from the field and were a chilly 2-of-11 from beyond the 3-point line for 18.2 percent. Sophomore guards Calvin O'Neil and Kevin Kanaskie were bright spots as they combined for 24 points, 12 rebounds and six assists. Kanaskie led the Blue Raiders with 13 points and had six assists, while O'Neil finished with 11 points and tied sophomore teammate Theryn Hudson with a game-high eight rebounds, which established new career highs for both players. Tim Blue also tallied double figures for the Blue Raiders with 11 points. "I thought Calvin really competed and he battled throughout," Davis said. "Kevin Kanaskie

also battled his tail off out there tonight and he had to play a lot of minutes because of our depth and foul trouble. I also thought Nigel Johnson had some good moments before fouling out. He's going to be fine." Middle Tennessee was guilty of 22 turnovers in the game, which is the most since the Blue Raiders committed 25 against Memphis last season. Ironically, it wasn't Tennessee's press that caused problems as the Blue Raiders had just four against it; however, it was an inability to get into the halfcourt offense that caused the most problems. "We had some problems getting into the offense and some of that was because of them but some of it was us not executing and not converting," O'Neil said. "We had some unforced turnovers in the halfcourt and you can't do that. We will be fine but this was disappointing." Tennessee, which was led by JaJuan Smith's 16 points, shot 48 percent from the field and won the battle of the boards, 44-33; however, the Vols had to work in order to finally pull away from the upset-minded Blue Raiders. Middle Tennessee battled back from an early 10-2 deficit to tie the contest 12-12 on the second of two Johnson free throws with 13:05 remaining in the first half. After battling back to even the score, Middle Tennessee went five minutes without scoring and Tennessee took advantage with an 8-0 run to increase its advantage to 20-12 before Blue's jumper ended the run and cut the deficit to 20-14 to keep his team in the game. Unfortunately, for Middle Tennessee, too many scoring lapses, combined with Tennessee runs, sent the visiting team into the half trailing 45-27. Tennessee's 15-6 run to close the first half essentially tilted the scales in its favor the rest of the way. Middle Tennessee will play Cumberland in the home opener Monday. Tipoff is set for 7 p.m.

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