Blue Raiders Defeat WKU; Earn No. 1 Seed in SBC Tourney

Secure share of SBC East title

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee volleyball (23-7, 14-3) did something no other Blue Raider volleyball club has done since joining the Sun Belt - they won a share of the Sun Belt East regular season title on Saturday. With the 3-1 (23-30, 30-22, 30-22, 30-25) victory over Western Kentucky (25-9, 14-3) Middle Tennessee is the No. 1 seed heading into the Sun Belt Tournament November 16-18 in Denton, Texas.

"We have a lot of work to do next week but what a way to win a match," said Head Coach Matt Peck. "It is a match that puts us in first place and in the driver's seat."

The win snaps Western Kentucky's 24-match home winning streak and it is the first time since November 5, 2000 the Blue Raiders have defeated the Toppers. It is also the first time in three out of the last five meetings the match hasn't gone five games.

With the strains of Credence Clearwater Revival's "Coming Up Around the Bend" wafting through E.A. Diddle Arena, Middle Tennessee savored its hard-fought win. After a giant kill by sophomore Ashley Adams closed out game four and the match the team rushed the court and collapsed on Adams helping her celebrate the win. So it seemed appropriate the song was playing, as it appears Middle Tennessee is coming around the bend and emerging to be a force to be reckoned with in the ranks of Sun Belt volleyball.

"This was one of our goals, to be playing our best volleyball at the end of the season," Peck said. "This wasn't even one of our best matches this year, I think we can play better."

It was yet another classic match between the two clubs. Western Kentucky took the early lead by winning game won. Middle Tennessee struggled early committing seven costly errors and hit .234.

The Blue Raiders bounced back in game two to tie the game. Middle Tennessee hit .324 in the match taking the early lead and never relinquishing it.

"We were very aggressive tonight," Peck said. "Western Kentucky tipped a lot on us early but we were able to pick those balls up. We did a very good job of keeping our composure and following the game plan."

With the match tied, it was time for the crucial game three. The third game has been Middle Tennessee's Achilles' heel, setting the tone for the rest of the match, but the Blue Raiders pushed past the weight of its importance to surge ahead.

Coming out of the break, Middle Tennessee jumped out to an early 2-0 lead but Western Kentucky fought back but after the match was tied at five the Blue Raiders took the lead and never looked back. Western Kentucky pulled within one, 12-11, but the Blue Raiders went on an 18-11 run to close out the game.

This led up to the decisive game four. Could Middle Tennessee close out game four and secure the victory? Western Kentucky opened the game by winning the first two points but Middle Tennessee kept plugging away and tied the game at three and an attack error by Western Kentucky's Jenna Gideon gave the Blue Raiders a 4-3 lead and Middle Tennessee never looked back.

Adams, who is flirting with the nickname "Automatic Adams," led both clubs with 26 kills on 42 attacks with two errors for a .571 attack percentage. Why the nickname? Because whenever she touches the ball the percentage is high she will get a kill.

Middle Tennessee also got strong play from senior Jessica Robinson who had 16 kills. Ashley Asberry was perfect with 12 kills on 15 attacks and no errors and Quanshell Scott had 10 kills. Freshman setter Leslie Clark recorded a double double with 62 assists and 10 digs. Junior liebero Alicia Lemau'u added 20 digs.

As a team, Middle Tennessee ended the match with a .325 attack percentage and averaged 3.5 blocks per game.

As the No. 1 seed, Middle Tennessee will face the No. 8 seed in the tournament to start the Sun Belt Championships on Thursday November 16. Match time is scheduled for noon. Seeding information will be released at the first of the week.

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