

# Blue Raiders open long homestand with comeback win

## Yates scores career-high 23 to lead MT past Belmont, 64-57

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### MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee showed tremendous resiliency and determination at a time when it had to the most in order to answer a gut-check and secure a gritty 64-57 win against visiting Belmont at Murphy Center Monday night. The Blue Raiders (2-4) trailed Belmont 27-11 with 7:01 remaining in the opening half but buckled down to outscore the Bruins, 53-30, the remainder of the game to earn the gutsy win and end a three-game losing skid, while also bringing a halt to Belmont's three-game win streak to open a five-game homestand. Freshman Desmond Yates led all scorers with a career-high 23 points on the strength of 9-of-16 shooting from the field. Yates also pulled a career-high six rebounds and he did the bulk of his damage when it mattered most, scoring 18 of his 23 points in the final 27 minutes of the game to ignite the Blue Raiders' comeback.

"We desperately needed a win

so this was a big win for us against a good team," Yates said. "I tried to take some of the responsibility on myself to score when we were finding it difficult to score because that's what coach expects me to do. My teammates were getting me the ball in good situations and I was able to finish some shots. It's great to get this win, especially how we had to fight back to get it." Sophomore guard Nigel Johnson had his best all-around game as a Blue Raider with 12 points, seven rebounds, four assists, and no turnovers, while senior forward Kyle Young continued his strong play to start the



season with eight points, a game-high eight rebounds and two assists. Young and Johnson proved to be invaluable not only because of their play, but also what they did and when they did it. Six of Young's eight rebounds came on the offensive end and four of them came in the second half. More importantly, all four second-half offensive caroms led to second-chance points for the Blue Raiders, and Johnson was Mr. Cool in the clutch. The guard scored 10 of his 12 points in the second half with the outcome of the game hanging in the balance. Yates gave the Blue Raiders their first lead since early in the game when he nailed a 18-foot jumper in transition to put Middle Tennessee on top 49-48 with 6:21 remaining. After a series of swapping baskets, Belmont (3-2) regained the lead, 53-51, on Josh Goodwin's 3-pointer with 3:33 remaining. Blue Raider point guard Kevin Kanaskie, who finished with nine points, five assists and three steals, drained a long 3-pointer with 2:56 remaining to give Middle Tennessee a 54-53 lead with 2:56 remaining, and Johnson followed a Bruins' miss at the free-throw line with a trey to extend the lead to 57-53 with 2:14 remaining. Belmont would get no closer than four down the stretch as the Blue Raiders connected on their free throws to ice the game. The prospects for victory didn't look too good early when the Bruins stormed out to a 27-11 lead on Boomer Herndon's layup with 7:01 remaining; however, the Blue Raiders reverted to the trademarks that have made them a tough opponent under Davis - defense and rebounding. Yates and Young keyed a strong finish to the first half as the Blue Raiders went on a 16-0 run over the final 7:01 to cut the deficit to 27-24 at the half and seize momentum. After shutting the Bruins out over the final 7:01 of the first half, Middle Tennessee's defense held them to just nine field goals in the second half on 37 percent shooting (27 percent from 3-point range). Middle Tennessee also outrebounded Belmont, 36-31, including an 18-11 advantage after intermission. Another key stat for the Blue Raiders was just two second-half turnovers after giving it up eight times in the first 20 minutes. The Blue Raiders continue their five-game homestand against Indiana State Thursday at 7 p.m. **Postgame Quotes**

#### **Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis**

##### **On the play of Belmont in the first half:**

"I got to give a lot of credit to Belmont. They played extremely well in the first 12 or 13 minutes, probably as good against us for that stretch as any team we have played at home since I've been here. We weren't good as we could be. We looked disoriented, tired and not together. A lot of it had to do with Belmont. They came out crisp and guarded us as the aggressor. We had to regroup and start defending again. We got down a little bit and panicked early; all we wanted to do early was shoot perimeter shots. Finally, we settled in and started getting in closer to the basket." **On the play of freshman forward Desmond Yates:**

"We saw it against Charleston in the second half. He has practiced a lot better and felt more comfortable in the last few sessions we've had. He's a good talent and I thought our guys did a good job getting the ball to him." **On getting the ball to Yates:**

"Our guys went to him a lot. He makes tough baseline (shots). I thought Nigel Johnson really had a great game. I thought those two guys; along with Kyle Young, were the MVPs of the game." **On taking several timeouts early in the first half:**

"I was going to use five, I didn't care. I don't think I ever had a team to be that disoriented. We didn't guard. We didn't get back and try to run the offense, it was bad. For our team to regroup, it was a nice win for us." **On the team's youth:**

"Tonight [we played] with three sophomores, a freshman and Kyle [Young]. I wanted to play Theryn [Hudson] but he couldn't guard those guys on the goal line. He was in the game for four defensive possessions and they scored on him every time. He's got to get better." **On the physical play of Belmont:**

"I think that was the toughest and most physical Belmont team we've played in three years. They are

always well coached, but they were more physical. The shots we made had to be tough shots. That team is going to win a lot of games." **On changing the game plan in the second half:**

"We beat Belmont two years in a row by switching all their stuff into the perimeter. (Assistant coach) Artie (Pepelea) suggested that our young guys were trying to think too much and I think he made a good point. We went back to man on man and started playing more physical." **Middle Tennessee vs. Belmont**

**Postgame Notes:**

**IN-STATE UNDER KERMIT:** With Monday's win over Belmont, Middle Tennessee moved its record against in-state opponents under Kermit Davis to 16-6. The Blue Raiders are now 13-2 against in-state opponents in the Murphy Center. **YATES HAS CAREER NIGHT:** Freshman Desmond Yates enjoyed a career night for the Blue Raiders as he poured in a personal-best 23 points on 9-for-16 shooting to go along with a career-high six rebounds in 35 minutes. Down 27-11 in the first half, Yates keyed a 13-0 run with seven points to bring the Blue Raiders to within three at intermission. The Somerville, Tenn., natives previous scoring high was eight points set against the College of Charleston. **JOHNSON HAS BEST GAME:** Sophomore Nigel Johnson turned in his best game as a Blue Raider in the win over Belmont. Johnson had 12 points, one shy of his season-high, and matched his personal-best with seven rebounds and four assists. The Memphis, Tenn., native put in 10 of his 12 points during the second half. **YOUNG TIES HAILEY:** Senior Kyle Young recorded one blocked shot against Belmont to move into seventh place on the all-time list with Buck Hailey. Young, who has three blocks on the season, ran his career total to 47 and needs just two more to tie Mantia Callender for sixth place. **DAVIS NOTCHES NO. 70:** Tonight's win over Belmont was the 70th for Coach Kermit Davis at Middle Tennessee and moved him closer to the Top 5 of the Blue Raiders' winningest coaches. Davis, who is now 70-54, needs just one more victory to tie Stan Simpson for fifth place and six to move into a tie for fourth with Charles Greer. **AT THE MURPH:** Middle Tennessee is now 351-121 at the Murphy Center all-time and 41-15 under Kermit Davis. **QUICK HITTERS:** The Blue Raiders are now 23-4 in non-conference games at home under Kermit Davis ... After trailing 27-11 in the first half, Middle Tennessee outscored the Bruins the rest of the way 53-30 ... MT is now 2-1 this season with Desmond Yates in the starting lineup ... Kyle Young is now 20-for-29 from the field over the last four games (.690) ... The 40 second half points scored by Middle Tennessee against Belmont was the most in the second period this season ... MT is now 2-0 this year when outrebounding the opposition.

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