

Blue, Yates help power Blue Raiders to third-straight victory

Middle Tennessee turns back Tennessee State, 67-56

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Tim Blue and Desmond Yates combined for 37 points and 13 rebounds as Middle Tennessee continued its winning ways by turning back in-state rival Tennessee State, 67-56, to win its third straight in front of 5,287 at Murphy Center Monday night.

The Blue Raiders (4-4) were led by Blue's 19-point performance, which included seven rebounds and a career-high tying three assists, while freshman forward Desmond Yates poured in 18 more points and tallied six boards. Kyle Young added nine points and Theryn Hudson tallied five more as Middle Tennessee dominated the inside game with its talented front-line players.

Middle Tennessee, which also received a career-high eight assists from sophomore point guard Kevin Kanaskie,

stormed to a 4-0 mark at Murphy Center and provided fifth-year Head Coach Kermit Davis with his 72nd career win with the Blue Raiders as he moved into fifth on the school's all-time wins list.

While the Blue Raiders were extremely efficient on the offensive end with a 51 percent shooting night and continued to play sterling defense, the difference in the game was the battle of the boards, particularly the offensive boards. Middle Tennessee outrebounded Tennessee State (2-4) by a 38-23 margin including a sizeable 15-7 edge on the offensive boards. The seven offensive rebounds were a season low for the Tigers.



"The thing that scares you about Tennessee State is being able to block them out," Davis said.

"They only got about seven (offensive) rebounds, which was a season low for them. That team got 19 (offensive) rebounds against Alabama. I was proud of our team. We got our rebounding back in the game. We out-rebounded a good rebounding team. Our field goal percentage is getting better. We are becoming a better offensive team. We aren't scoring a lot of points right now, but I think we are playing pretty efficient."

Middle Tennessee got off to a good start at home in the third game of a current five-game homestand and shot 55 percent in the opening half; however, the Blue Raiders only led 36-35 at the half because the Tigers were equally hot from the field.

The highly-competitive contest saw 12 lead changes and six ties before the Blue Raiders went on a 12-3 run down the stretch to turn a 55-51 advantage into a 67-54 cushion with 39 seconds remaining.

In addition to the strong rebounding effort, which saw four Blue Raiders pull six or more rebounds, including a career-tying seven rebounds for sophomore guard Calvin O'Neil, Middle Tennessee controlled the game with the consistent play of its big men - Blue, Yates, Young and Hudson. The quartet combined to score 51 of the team's 67 points on the strength of 21-of- 39 from the field, while limiting the Tigers' frontline to just 17 points.

Middle Tennessee shot 50 percent or better from the field for the second straight game due in large part because of its offensive rebounding as Blue and Yates combined for nine offensive rebounds and turned them into easy second-chance points.

The Blue Raiders will focus on final exams during the remainder of the week and they return to action against Martin Methodist in an exhibition game at Murphy Center Saturday at 7 p.m., before turning their attention to the Sun Belt opener against Louisiana-Monroe, Dec. 17, at 4 p.m.

Postgame Quotes

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis

On the play of Tennessee State:

"I have a lot of respect for the job Cy [Alexander] does with his team. I think they're a real physical team. I thought that we came out tonight and we went to our bench that had been so good for us and they weren't ready to go. All of a sudden, [LaDarius] Weaver gets his head up and makes two 3-pointers in a row and now their team thinks they can win the game. Their team played with tons of emotion and a lot of energy. I think they will do very well in the Ohio Valley."

On the play of Tennessee State junior guard LaDarius Weaver:

"We had to make a substitution to get a different guy to guard him. I thought he really made some hard cuts."

On the team's offensive performance:

"It was a good win, we did just what we thought what we wanted to do. We got our rebounding back in the game. We out-rebounded a good rebounding team. Our field goal percentage is getting better. We are becoming a better offensive team. We aren't scoring a lot of points right now, but I think we are playing pretty efficient."

On applying defensive pressure to Tennessee State:

"I thought that when we changed our defense to our zone, our double fist defense, I thought it slowed them down. They made a couple of shots, a couple of guys that normally don't make them, made them. We stayed right with it. I thought Calvin O'Neil really rebounded the ball extremely well out of the zone. He had seven rebounds, six defensive rebounds, and I thought he was huge during that stretch."

On communicating more effectively:

"We've worked a lot on communicating better. On our first trip down, we didn't communicate. We finally started doing that and located [LaDarius] Weaver. We contested shots there and we played good personnel. The thing that scares you about Tennessee State is being able to block them out. They only got about seven (offensive) rebounds, that was a season low for them. That team got 19 rebounds against Alabama. I was proud of our team."

On different offensive schemes used during the game:

"Their zone is a match-up, so you don't run typical zone offense. We ran our sets, our triangle offense, and we thought if we got them confused about who's guarding who that would give us some easy baskets."

On the play of Tiger junior guard Reiley Ervin:

"He likes this arena. His team won about three state championships in here. His freshman year he came in here and made three 3-pointers. He likes this arena and he makes a lot of shots, especially when he was at White Station. He got his confidence up during this game. If they can find one other guy that can shoot in the perimeter for them, they are going to be a dangerous team."

Senior Forward Tim Blue

On Middle Tennessee's play in the second half

"Coach talked to use about playing better defense and not giving up the easy buckets like in the first half."

On the play of Tennessee State's Clarence Matthews

"He's really strong and crafty with the ball. All we can try to do is double team him to keep him from getting shots."

On defending Tennessee State center Larry Turner

"We wanted to keep him in foul trouble. We were able to do this in the first half and were able to limit his playing time throughout the rest of the game."

Freshman Forward Desmond Yates

On Middle Tennessee's performance against Tennessee State

"We really wanted to come out and rebound well. Tennessee State has been averaging around 15 (offensive) rebounds a game. So we needed to play strong defense and rebound strong because we haven't been putting a lot of points on the board."

On Middle Tennessee's play down low against Tennessee State

"We have a lot of talent around the basket such as myself, Tim [Blue] and Kyle [Young]. We try to get it inside as much as possible especially when the outside shots are closed."

On Middle Tennessee's scoring of the bench

"We have a young team and it is good to get our younger players on the bench experience. In the next season or two I think Theyrn Hudson will be on the All Sun Belt team. Coach has been reminding him to stay ready coming off the bench. He has been playing very well in practice lately and he came off the bench and played well tonight. We needed it."

Postgame Notes

KANASKIE SETS ASSIST MARK: Middle Tennessee point guard Kevin Kanaskie, who is coming off a career-high in points with 17 against Indiana State, registered another personal-best on Monday against TSU. The sophomore dished out a career-best eight assists which was the most by a Blue Raider since Fats Cuyler handed out eight against Florida Atlantic on Dec. 21, 2005. The eight assists rank tied for 18th all-time at Middle Tennessee.

NO. 72 FOR DAVIS: Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis picked up his 72nd win at the helm of the Blue Raiders to inch closer to No. 4 on the all-time win list. The fifth-year coach needs just four more victories to tie Charles Greer for fourth place.

BLUE STEPPING UP: Senior Tim Blue is playing the best basketball of his Blue Raider career and the past two games are proof of the big man's improvement. After recording his second career double-double in the win over Indiana State last Thursday, Blue came back to score a season-high 19 points (one shy of career-high), rip down seven rebounds, and dish out a career-best tying three assists. Over his last two games, Blue is averaging 16.5 points, 9.0 rebounds, and is shooting 51.8 percent (14-for-27) from the field.

YOUNG REMAINS HOT FROM FIELD: Senior Kyle Young, who ranks third in the Sun Belt in field goal percentage at 60.5 percent, continued his hot shooting by going 4 for 7 from the field in the win over TSU. Over his last six games, Young has shot 67.4 percent (29-43).

HITTING THE BOARDS: A key to Middle Tennessee's victory over Tennessee State on Monday night was its ability to rebound the basketball. The Blue Raiders owned a 38-23 advantage on the glass for their largest margin on the boards this season and the largest since outrebounding FIU by 15 a year ago on the road. The most impressive rebounding number against TSU was on the offensive end where MT had a 15 to 7 advantage to record its most offensive caroms of the season.

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee ran its record to a perfect 3-0 against Tennessee State under Kermit Davis ... MT is now 4-1 this year when holding the opponent to 70 points or less ... MT held TSU to a season-low seven offensive rebounds ... The Blue Raiders shot over 50 percent for the second straight game marking the first time MT has topped the 50 percent mark in back-to-back contests since accomplishing the feat against Belmont and Freed-Hardeman last season - a span of 29 games ... MT is now 25-4 in non-conference home games under Kermit Davis ... MT is back to even on its overall record for the first time since Nov. 13 when the Blue Raiders were 1-1.

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