

Blue Raiders get defensive in 60-46 win at FIU

Kanaskie, Yates lead squad to victory with 13 points apiece

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MIAMI - Middle Tennessee turned up the defensive pressure cooker in order to close 2006 on a positive note in a 60-46 win against Florida International here Sunday afternoon.

The Blue Raiders, who entered the game allowing a Sun Belt-low 66.8 points per game, stifled the Golden Panthers from the outset and turned up the defensive intensity as the game progressed. The 46 points allowed were the second fewest under fifth-year Head Coach Kermit Davis against a SBC member and the fewest since Middle Tennessee claimed a 60-42 win against Florida International March 1, 2004 - a span of 75 games.

Middle Tennessee secured its 18th league road win under Davis, which is tied for the most of any current conference member since the 2002-03 season, and enabled the Blue Raiders (5-8, 1-2) to end a four-game losing streak.

"We have put a lot of emphasis on league road games. This was not the prettiest game but it's a good win for our team," said Davis. "I just thought we defended a lot better in this game. We have a lot of work to do but I was proud of the win today."



Blue Raider sophomore point guard Kevin Kanaskie continued his fine work this season, tying freshman Desmond Yates for game-high scoring honors with 13. He also tied his career high of eight assists, collected two steals and pulled three rebounds. Yates' 13 points were his seventh double-figure scoring game in the last eight contests, while Tim Blue finished with 10 points and pulled seven of the Blue Raiders' season-high 40 rebounds. Freshman Darren Avery contributed a career-high nine points on the strength of three 3-pointers.

"Kevin Kanaskie was just solid," Davis said. "He ran the whole game and was the best guard on the floor today. I thought a big key to the game was that we got some really good minutes from Calvin O'Neil and Darren Avery and we have needed two other guys to play."

The Blue Raiders held Florida International (6-7, 1-2) to just 13 field goals and its 24.5 shooting percentage (13-of-53) was the lowest against the Blue Raiders in a SBC contest.

"We knew this was a big game, especially after losing two conference games at home to start the season," Kanaskie said. "We really needed this game in order to help make up for that. I thought we were fortunate early in that Florida International missed some open looks but we did play solid defense and we contested shots today and that was a big difference for us."

A big key to the Blue Raiders' defensive superlatives was holding Alex Galindo to 11 points on 3-of-16 shooting from the field. He was averaging 20 points in his first two SBC games after transferring from Kansas.

Middle Tennessee took control of the game early by jumping out to a 14-5 advantage on Kanaskie's 15-footer. From there, Florida International never got closer than six points the remainder of the game.

"This was our first conference road game and we have been a good road team in the league. We have to get back to winning games like this," Davis said. "Our team came in with a purpose. It feels good when you have lost some leads like we have lost them with a young team just to hold on. It was a happy locker room for sure."

Florida International misfired on 18 of its first 21 field-goal attempts, including an 0-of-6 showing from 3-point range and was never able to mount a serious comeback due in large part to its offensive inability, coupled with Middle Tennessee shooting 60 percent (12-of-20) in the second half.

A big key for the Blue Raiders in the second half was the play of Yates and Blue, who hails from nearby Palm Beach, Fla. Yates and Blue combined for 17 second-half points with Yates accounting for 11 of his 13 after intermission.

Middle Tennessee will look to even its SBC record when it travels to Mobile, Ala., to face defending champion South Alabama Tuesday. Tipoff is 7 p.m.

NOTES: Kermit Davis notched his 210th career win with the victory against Florida International ... Kyle Young played in his 100th career game against Florida International and made his 76th career start ... Tim Blue is from nearby Palm Beach, Fla., and had several family members in attendance Sunday ... The Blue Raiders improved to 3-1 on New Year's Eve ... Middle Tennessee improved to 60-4 under Davis when outshooting the opposition ... The Blue Raiders improved to 56-10 when leading at the half under Davis and they are 63-12 when leading in the final five minutes.

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