Blue Raiders continue road assault with 61-60 win at UALR

School record road win streak at five

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Desmond Yates has enjoyed a breakthrough freshman season for Middle Tennessee and the sensational rookie has demonstrated a knack for scoring as evidenced by leading the team in that category for the seventh time with 15 points at UALR Saturday night. His biggest play at UALR; however, may have been a deflection as Middle Tennessee escaped the Stephens Center with a 61-60 triumph in front of a raucous crowd of 4,108 to improve to 5-0 on the road in Sun Belt Conference play. UALR had the ball under its basket with three-tenths of a second remaining and was looking to get an inbound to center Rashad Jones-Jennings for a chance at the tip-in and victory; however, Yates deflected the ball away to seal the final frantic seconds and send the Blue Raiders to a fifth-straight conference road win. The 5-0 start in conference road games ties the school record set by the 1975-75 Blue Raiders for longest league road win streak at any point in the season and provided Middle Tennessee (9-10, 5-4) with its 20th SBC road win under Head Coach Kermit Davis - the most league road wins of any conference team since the start of the 2002-03 season. The Trojans (9-12, 4-6) had three chances to win the game in the final three seconds after trailing by 18 with 8:08 remaining. Jones-Jennings' dunk with 55 seconds remaining cut the deficit to 61-60 and UALR regained possession following a Kevin Kanaskie miss with 28 seconds remaining. UALR again tried to go to Jones-Jennings for the winner but his attempt was partially blocked by Blue and the ball went out of

bounds with two seconds remaining. The Trojans got the ball in to Lakheythan Malone, whose shot was blocked out of bounds by Blue with three-tenths of a second remaining. The final attempt at a comeback win was thwarted by Yates, who led by Blue Raiders in scoring for the seventh time with 15 points. He also tied teammate Kyle Young for the team lead in rebounds with six, marking the third straight game in which he had led the squad in scoring and rebounding. "I was just trying to get a piece of that ball at the end of the game," Yates said. "Coach (Davis) was telling us to get between the players and I felt they would try to get a lob to Jones-Jennings because they didn't have time to really catch and shoot. I was able to deflect it away and we are excited to get out of here with a win." In addition to Yates' 15-point performance, Calvin O'Neil tallied 11 and Theryn Hudson finished with 10, while Tim Blue came up big with seven points - all in the second half. Kevin Kanaskie tallied eight points and dished out six assists in the win, which provided Davis with his 77th win at Middle Tennessee and moved him into fourth place on the school's all-time wins list. "This was a very good win for our team on the road against a tough, hard-nosed UALR team," Davis said. "We had a stretch there in the second half when we got the lead to 18 that may have been the best stretch of basketball we have had a team play since I've been here but then UALR started their comeback. That's what makes me so proud of these guys tonight. UALR had it going, the crowd got into the game, but our team kept fighting and did the necessary things to win at the end." Middle Tennessee and UALR have played some classics since the Blue Raiders joined the Sun Belt in 2000-01 and Saturday night's battle between two of the league's top defensive and rebounding squads would certainly qualify. The Blue Raiders controlled the first half and eventually built a 32-25 lead at intermission. UALR cut Middle Tennessee's lead to 36-32 with 16:48 remaining in the game but the Blue Raiders followed with one of their most impressive runs of the season. Middle Tennessee outscored UALR, 20-6, over the next 8:29 to build a 56-38 advantage on Kanaskie's 3-pointer with 8:18 remaining. The run included several key baskets and big plays from different Blue Raiders, including a long 3-pointer from O'Neil that kind of spurred the avalanche. Davis knew UALR wouldn't go quietly - and it did not. The Trojans answered Middle Tennessee's run with an impressive one of their own - one that included 3-pointers on four straight possessions and baskets on nine straight possessions to bring the crowd back to life. By the time the dust had settled the game was back on with the Blue Raiders clinging to a 60-57 lead with 2:57 remaining. From there it was a defensive showcase as only four points were scored the rest of the way to set the tone for the thrilling finish. Middle Tennessee had to rely on its sterling defense because it found a way to win by scoring just one free throw in the final 4:31. Young's tip dunk with 4:31 remaining would be the Blue Raiders' final field goal and provided the team a 60-51 lead at that point. The Blue Raiders, like they have done so many times on the road in league play, came out strong to start the game and established themselves with crisp offense, tenacious defense and relentless rebounding. Leading the charge in the first half was the duo of Hudson and Yates. Hudson scored 10 points on 5-of-6 shooting from the field in the opening half, while Yates continued to be one of the league's most dynamic freshmen with nine points on 4-of-4 shooting. As a team, Middle Tennessee shot 53.8 percent (14-of-26) from the field, including 50 percent (3-of-6) from 3-point range. The Blue Raiders bolted out to a 16-10 lead only to see the Trojans battle back and eventually take a 25-24 lead on Byron Ray's three-point play with 4:39 remaining in the half. Middle Tennessee buckled down at that point and used a 8-0 run the rest of the way to take a 32-24 lead into the half. Hudson scored the final four points of the half to carry the Blue Raiders into the half with momentum. **NOTES:** Middle Tennessee improved to 5-0 on the road in SBC games, tying the school record for most consecutive road league wins at any point in the season. They tied the 1974-75 squad ... The win was Middle Tennessee's 20th road win against SBC competition under Head Coach Kermit Davis, which are the most of any league member since the 2002-03 season ... Davis earned his 77th win at Middle Tennessee to move past

Charles Greer for fourth on the all-time wins list. Third on the list is Randy Wiel with 84 career wins ... The Blue Raiders improved to 4-2 in January ...Freshman forward Dino Hair made his first career start against UALR ... The Blue Raiders started three sophomores (Kevin Kanaskie, Theryn Hudson, Calvin O'Neil) and two freshmen (Desmond Yates, Dino Hair) against UALR ... Yates led Middle Tennessee in scoring for the seventh time and produced double figures scoring for the 12th time in 14 games ... Yates averaged 19 points, six rebounds and shot 70 percent (16-of-23) from the field, including 71 percent (5-of-7) from 3-point range over the last two games ... Kevin Kanaskie led the Blue Raiders with six assists against UALR and has led the team in that category in 18 of 19 games. He is averaging 6.3 assists per game, which leads the SBC and is No. 8 nationally. He is currently third on the school's single-season assists list in regard to average per game ... Middle Tennessee improved to 64-4, including 9-2 this season, under Davis when outshooting the opposition.

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