

Red-hot Raiders roll to 75-49 win against Denver

Team wins for eighth time in 11 outings

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee continued its late-season surge by combining one of its strongest defensive showings with one of its top offensive games in a 75-49 win against Denver in front of 4,512 at Murphy Center Thursday night. The Blue Raiders won for the fourth time in five games and climbed above the .500 mark (12-11, 7-5) for the first time this season on the heels of winning eight-of-11 after slipping to 4-8 at midseason. Middle Tennessee remained in the thick of the SBC East Division game and now eyes a showdown against division-leading South Alabama Saturday at the Murphy Center at 7 p.m. After starting SBC play 0-2, Middle Tennessee has won seven of the next 10 conference game to make a



move up the standings. Kyle Young led a balanced Middle Tennessee scoring attack with 13 points, followed by Kevin Kanaskie and Tim Blue with 11 each, while Theryn Hudson tallied 10. Hudson also had a career-high 10 rebounds to record his first career double double. Middle Tennessee's big men keyed an offensive surge that enabled the Blue Raiders to rack up their second-highest point total of the season and their highest output at Murphy Center. The Blue Raiders also shot 51.7 percent (31-of-60), marking the eighth time it has shot 50 percent or better, and they are 7-1 in those contests. While the offense was clicking, Middle Tennessee's staple - tough, hard-nosed defense - was again on display against Denver, particularly in the second half. After allowing 32 first-half points the SBC's leading defensive team buckled down in the second half and allowed just 17 points on 18 percent (4-of-22) shooting. The four second-half field goals were the fewest allowed by Middle Tennessee in the second half this season. The Blue Raiders also controlled the boards, outrebounding the visiting Pionners (3-19, 2-10), 38-25, with Hudson leading the way for the seventh time in his career.

Freshmen also came up big for the Blue Raiders as Dino Hair tallied a career-high seven points (on 3-of-3 shooting) and pulled a career-high four rebounds. Darren Avery made his third consecutive start and once again proved to be a defensive nemesis as he teamed with Calvin O'Neil to hold DaShawn Walker in check. Walker, who entered the game averaging 16 points overall and 17 against SBC opponents, finished with nine points on 2-of-8 shooting. Middle Tennessee clinged to a slim 34-32 lead at the intermission but a strong second-half surge turned the game in its favor for good. The Blue Raiders opened the second half with a 12-2 run to build a 46-34 lead on Avery's 3-pointer with 14:32 remaining and Denver would not get closer than eight the remainder of the game.

POSTGAME NOTES:

ON A ROLL: Middle Tennessee's win against Denver was its third straight, fourth in five games and eighth in the last 11. The Blue Raiders, who were 4-8 on Dec. 28, have rallied to go 8-3 since and boost the overall record to 12-11, marking the first time they have been over the .500 mark this season. **OFFENSE CLICKING:** The Blue Raiders turned in one of their best offensive performances of the season against Denver Thursday night. The 75 points are the most Middle Tennessee has scored at home this season and represent the second-highest scoring output of the season. They scored 76 in a win at New Orleans (1/13/07). Middle Tennessee also enjoyed season highs for field goals made (31) and attempted (60) against the Pioneers. The 51.7 percent showing from the field is the highest of the season at home. **50 PERCENT OR HIGHER:** Middle Tennessee won for the seventh straight time when shooting 50 percent or higher from the field against the Pioneers. The Blue Raiders' 51.7 shooting percentage is the highest of the season at home and marks the eighth time they have shot 50 percent or better this season. Middle Tennessee is 7-1 in those games with the only setback coming against Toledo in the Paradise Jam Tournament when they shot 58.3 percent in a 75-69 overtime loss. **OUTSHOOTING THE OPPOSITION:** Middle Tennessee improved to 11-22 this season and 67-4 overall under Head Coach Kermit Davis when outshooting the opposition. The Blue Raiders have won 40 of their last 42 games when they have a higher shooting percentage than the opposition. **DEFENSE REMAINS NASTY:** By holding Denver to 49 points - the third-fewest allowed to an opponent this season - Middle Tennessee has limited the opposition to 59 points or less 10 times this season and the Blue Raiders are 9-1 in those games. Middle Tennessee, which leads the SBC in scoring defense (63.0), put together one of its finest defensive displays against the Pioneers in the second half. Denver's four second-half field goals were the fewest allowed in a half by Middle Tennessee this season and it marked the fourth time the Blue Raiders have held an opponent to single digit field goals in the second half this season. They are 4-0 in those games. Denver shot just 18.2 percent (4-of-22) from the field in the second half against Middle Tennessee and the 32.6 percent percentage for the game is the second lowest against the Blue Raiders this season. **DEFENSIVE STOPPER:** Freshman Darren Avery has earned starts in three straight games for Middle Tennessee and the Blue Raiders have won all three contests. Avery's greatest asset during this stretch has been his defense as he has started against the opponent's leading scorer in each game and held him below his scoring average. Avery helped limit Louisiana-Lafayette's Ross Mouton to 14 points to start the streak. He held South Dakota State's Matt Cadewell to 10 points, and he limited Denver guard DaShawn Walker to nine points. **HUDSON DOUBLES UP:** Sophomore Theryn Hudson recorded his first career double double with a career-high 10 rebounds and added 10 points on 4-of-6 shooting against Denver. Hudson led the Blue Raiders in rebounding for the seventh time in his career. **BIG MEN REPRESENT:** Middle Tennessee's trio of big men - Kyle Young, Tim Blue, and Hudson - combined to have their best collective game of the season against Denver. The three players were a combined 14-of-22 for 64 percent from the field, scored 34 points and pulled 17 rebounds. Young was 6-of-9 from the field with 13 points, followed by Blue's 4-of-7 for 11 points, while Hudson was 4-of-6 for 10 points. Middle

Tennessee's big men combined to score 37 of the first 43 Blue Raider points against the Pioneers. **SOLID AS A ROCK:** Young has been a fixture in the Middle Tennessee lineup during his career and he played in his 110th career game and started for the 83rd time against Denver. The 83 starts tie him with Robert Taylor for ninth on the all-time list. The 110 games played are tied for fifth on the all-time list. **QUICK HITS:** The 26-point margin of victory was the greatest for Middle Tennessee since a 44-point win against Freed-Hardeman, Dec. 18, 2005 - a span of 43 games - and the margin of victory is the highest against a SBC opponent since a 35-point win (85-80) against UALR, Jan. 10, 2005 ... Freshman John Hobson saw his first career playing time against Denver ... Freshman Dino Hair enjoyed his best game as a Blue Raider with a career-high seven points on 3-of-3 shooting. Hair also had a career-high four rebounds ... Nigel Johnson's five assists against Denver are a career-high. He had just one turnover ... Middle Tennessee began February with a 1-0 mark. The Blue Raiders are 21-9 in February under Davis. **POSTGAME QUOTES:**

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis

On the second half:

"I thought the second half was just a great effort. We had more guys play better offensively in the second half. I thought Nigel Johnson really played a lot better. For the first time, we extended the lead dramatically without Kevin Kanaskie in the game, that's positive for us." **On resting players in the second half:**

"Saturday is the fifth game in 10 days. I thought it was pretty good knowing that we are playing South Alabama on Saturday and that we could rest some people late in the second half tonight." **On the play of Darren Avery:**

"We've finally found a defensive stopper. We told them since October that whoever can guard the other team's best players will get a lot of minutes. I was really excited that Darren Avery is starting to take some pride in that." **On the attendance from the game:**

"I thought it was great. We really appreciate all our season ticket holders. We had more students tonight. I really want to thank Alan Jackson and the World Outreach Church. They are so involved with Middle Tennessee Athletics. Not just for the basketball program, but for the entire MTSU athletic department, as well as a lot of other churches in our town. We thank them for all that they do."

Middle Tennessee Freshman Guard Darren Avery

On his defensive effort:

"Starting off the game if I am guarding their best perimeter players then it gives me a lot of confidence to come out and play. That gets me started and motivates me for the game. I was doing what Coach [Kermit Davis] told me to do: to sit in and watch [DaShawn Walker] wherever he goes."

On his offensive game:

"[Defense and offense] go hand-in-hand. I play better when I start. Playing defense gave me confidence to keep going. It gets my head on right." **Middle Tennessee Sophomore Center Theryn Hudson**

On Middle Tennessee's defense:

"We just wanted to play hard tonight and play well defensively. I think the first-half we did not play good defense but the second-half we came out and shut them down to 17 points." **On the importance of Saturday's match-up against South Alabama:**

"I think it is real big because it would give us a better record for when we start the [Sun Belt Conference] Tournament. If we beat them then the next game then we will have more confidence at home because it will be three [wins] in a row." **Middle Tennessee Senior Forward Kyle Young:**

On Middle Tennessee's improved inside game:

"I don't think it was part of our game-plan to start out with. We were trying to distribute it evenly but that is just how it happened. Guys from the perimeter got it inside and we were making baskets."

Then it spread out and went opposite in the second-half where our perimeter [players] were doing the scoring." **On Saturday's match-up with South Alabama:**

"You can definitely feel the momentum going but it's not something that you sit there and go on because South Alabama is leading our league and they are going to play us hard here. It is a game we have to prepare for like any other game." **University of Denver Assistant Coach Kevin Reynolds:**

Thoughts on the game:

"[Middle Tennessee] did a nice job. Their guys got some confidence making some baskets and [Nigel] Johnson did not shoot the ball well in the first-half but got his rhythm in the second-half and made two or three big shots. [Desmond] Yates also hit some shots from the perimeter. The inside game was what initially hurt us in the first-half and we had to guard the post a little more than we would have liked. Their guys only missed about three shots combined in the first-half inside." **On Denver's offensive woes:**

"I think they and Coach [Kermit] Davis did a nice job making some half-time adjustments that proved to be beneficial. We got caught in one of those ruts where we missed two or three easy shots and guys lost their confidence. That is nothing to take away from their defense; they did a very good job defensively." **On Middle Tennessee's Darren Avery and Calvin O'Neil:**

"We knew they had to be the ones who were going to guard [Dashawn Walker]. To start the game we thought that we had a [favorable] height match-up and get him closer but they did a nice job guarding him and he missed some point-blank shots to start the game. They did a good job of denying him on the perimeter. You have to tip your hat to those guys. Our two better wing scorers were 5-of-19 from the field so it was obviously a good defensive job." **On looking ahead to the rest of the season:**

"We play Arkansas State at home 'Super Bowl Sunday.' Every game is important to us as the seeding goes for the conference tournament. It sounds like the cliché but with Coach [Terry Carroll, personal matter] not with us we try to get through the rest of the season. We just have to get some momentum going into the [Sun Belt] Conference Tournament."

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