# O'Neil keys win with career-high 21 points as Blue Raiders reach quarterfinals

## Starting guards combine for 47 points in win at Troy

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**TROY, Ala.** - Advancing at tournament time is all about guard play and Middle Tennessee's trio of sophomores on the perimeter proved to be difference makers as the No. 9 seeded Blue Raiders turned back No. 8 Troy, 72-64, in front of 2,834 at Trojan Arena Wednesday night. The Blue Raiders (14-16) advance into the quarterfinals at Lafayette, La., where they will face top-seeded South Alabama Sunday at 12:30 p.m., and you can point to several reasons why; however, the biggest has to be guard play. Calvin O'Neil scored 19 of his career-high 21 points in the second half, while All-SBC pick Kevin Kanaskie tallied 13 points and a career-high eight rebounds, followed by 12 points and seven rebounds from Nigel Johnson, who continued his late-season tear. While the guard play was stupendous the contributions of reserve post Dino Hair also were paramount as the Blue Raiders improved to 4-1 in SBC Tournament openers under Head Coach Kermit Davis. Hair tallied a career-high eight points and four rebounds, as the Blue Raiders won the rebounding battle, 38-35. Tim Blue finished with seven points and seven rebounds. "We were not ready for the season to end here

tonight," said O'Neil, who has scored 36 points in his last two games. "We had a good plan and Coach Davis did a good job giving us a plan, like he always does and we did a good job of carrying it out tonight. All wins are nice but tournament wins are even better. We are taking it one game at a time." The game certainly captured the tournament fervor with nine ties and 20 lead changes; however, it was Middle Tennessee doing what it has done better than any other Sun Belt team since Davis' arrival in Murfreesboro - winning on the road. The Blue Raiders, who had lost two previous meetings against Troy (13-17) this season, beat a league opponent on the road for the sixth time this season. "I'm very proud of our team tonight," Davis said. "Our players showed tremendous toughness in this game, like they have on the road all season, and they just wouldn't allow Troy to come back and take it after we built the lead late. It was a great tournament atmosphere and I congratulate Troy for what they did in promoting the game. We had so many different people contribute to this but obviously (O'Neil and Hair) were huge during that late run. It's nice to still be playing at this time of year." The tightly-contested game saw Middle Tennessee carry a 22-20 lead into the half and it remained tight for the brunt of the second half. O'Darien Bassett tied the game, 45-45, with the second of two free throws with 6:25 remaining. It marked the ninth tie of the contest but the Blue Raiders quickly regained the lead on Kanaskie's 3-pointer from the baseline. Not only did his trey provide Middle Tennessee with the lead, but it also ignited a 15-2 run that enabled the Blue Raiders to build a 60-47 advantage with 1:29 remaining. Hair followed Kanaskie's 3-pointer with a three-point play the old fashioned way to stretch the advantage to 51-45 with 5:35 remaining. Hair had five of his eight points during the run. Troy wouldn't go quietly, though, as Cedric Jackson connected for consecutive 3-pointers and the Trojans went on to cut the deficit to four four different times down the stretch. Middle Tennessee was solid at the line, though, and wouldn't let Troy get closer than that by knocking down 12-of-14 free throws in the final 51 seconds. O'Neil was a solid 8-of-8 at the charity stripe. **NOTES:** Middle Tennessee improved to 4-1 in SBC Tournament openers under Head Coach Kermit Davis ... The Blue Raiders won their sixth SBC road game this season and the 21st under Davis, which is the most of any league member since the start of the 2002-03 season ... The Blue Raiders improved to 6-6 all-time in the SBC Tournament ... The win against Troy was Middle Tennessee's first in four tries against the Trojans as SBC members ... Calvin O'Neil's 21 points are a career high, as are Dino Hair's eight points ... With two 3-pointers against Troy, Kevin Kanaskie moved into a tie for fifth with Chris Rainey (1989) and Torrey Moore (1997) on the single-season 3-point field goals made list at Middle Tennessee with 65 ... Senior forward Kyle Young tied Lee Nosse for second on the career games played list with 117 and he made his 88th career start - sixth on the career list ... Middle Tennessee improved to 69-7 under Davis when outshooting the opposition, 63-12 when leading at the half, and 71-12 when leading with five minutes remaining ... The Blue Raiders are 6-2 this season when scoring 70-plus points ... Kanaskie made his 41st consecutive start, which is tops on the team, and he has hit at least one 3-pointer in 18 straight games.

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