San Jose State beats Blue Raiders with late basket

Green scored game-high 17 in debut

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's valiant comeback effort almost resulted in a remarkable opening win but the same defensive lapses that put the team in a sizeable hole in the first place popped up again at the most inopportune time - with the game on the line. San Jose State's DaShawn Wright converted an open layup on a backdoor cut with five seconds remaining and Kevin Kanaskie's desperation 3-pointer on the other end was off the mark as time expired, and the Spartans escaped with a 78-77 win in the First Shot Tournament at Murphy Center. "They got an open shot under the basket to win the game and the ending was almost fitting because that's what they had done all night against (Kanaskie)," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "It was a good battle coming back but we just could not stop them. We just couldn't get stops and they build their big lead in the same fashion." San Jose State led by as many as 17 in the first half and 39-30 at the half before the Blue Raiders put together the strong second-half rally. Nigel Johnson's clutch 3-pointer with 24 seconds remaining, just after he had forced a turnover on a 5-second count on the defensive end, had given Middle Tennessee a 77-76 lead - their first since a 4-2 edge with 17:08 remaining in the first half. The visiting Spartans called a timeout to set up the final

play and Middle Tennessee was unable to get the critical stop it needed to capture the season-opening win at home. Newcomer Demetrius Green has a smashing Blue Raider debut with a game-high 17 points on 6-of-6 shooting from the field, including 2-of-2 from 3-point range. He also had a game-high six rebounds. Green was one of five players in double figures, followed by Desmond Yates' 16-point performance. Kanaskie finished with 11 points and Johnson and Calvin O'Neil finished with 10. Johnson also had five assists. O'Neil was injured in the second half and did not return. A MRI will be done on his right knee Friday to determine the severity of the injury. "Calvin is one of the toughest kids I've ever coached and he couldn't put any pressure on it," Davis said. "It doesn't look good but we will wait and see what the results of the MRI are." Middle Tennessee used a 15-6 run from the 18:40 mark of the second half to 14:28 to close to within 51-47 and they later tied the game 54-54 but could never get over the hump despite it being a one-possession game the majority of the final 10 minutes. San Jose State extended the lead back to 75-69 with 2:39 remaining before the Blue Raiders rallied behind the play of Johnson, who nailed a two 3-pointers between a Green layup in the next three possessions. Middle Tennessee will try to rebound against Lipscomb in its second game of the First Shot Tournament Friday at 7 p.m. **Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes**

Head Coach Kermit Davis

On the loss: "I have got to give it up to San Jose State. We just couldn't stop them. It is disappointing for us. They scored on top of us. Bottom line is we couldn't get stops. " **On Junior guard Calvin O'Neil's second-half injury:** "He is the heart and soul of our team. It is too bad for him because he has been playing so well. He is one of the toughest guys I've ever coached." **With O'Neil injured do you lean more on junior guard Demetrius Green?** "Yes we're going to lean on him. We are going to fit him in the rotation. He is a good offensive player. He took balls to the rim tonight and was a big factor in our comeback." **Junior Guard Demetrius Green**

On taking over for Calvin O'Neil and finding rhythm: "I had to step up. Calvin is big - he is one of the best players on our team. We really miss him when he's out. I had to step up and fill in for him and for what he does." **Junior Guard Nigel Johnson:**

On loosing the home opener:

"We have a long season ahead of us. It hurts in a way, but we have to put this game behind us and go on." **On 3-pointer on to give the Blue Raiders the lead late:**

"It was a play for Kevin [Kanaskie] to shoot the 3 but I came off the screen, I was open and I took the shot. It was the spot we needed to be in, but we just couldn't get the stop at the end of the game. Unfortunately, we lost." **San Jose State coach George Nessman:**

On Team and Justin Graham:

"Justin Graham is a great example of the youth on our team. He made a lot of mistakes tonight, but he just kept making big play after big play. We need to work to get the mistakes lower and keep the quotient of big plays going. You see the character of these young guys and they have a lot of fight in them, but that doesn't mean anything but that we're 1-and-0. That's a whole lot better than 0-and-1."

On last play of game:

"It wasn't designed specifically [for DeShawn Wright]; he was one of our reads. When Justin Graham penetrated we ran Tim Pierce to the top. That allowed DeShawn to run the basket cut and turn the corner. Justin was supposed to make a read. He had three options and obviously he made the right one. It doesn't matter really what we draw, it's just what the kid is going to do. Justin had to make the play and DeShawn had to finish it. They deserve all the credit on that."

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