Blue Raiders Top FIU 3-1 to Advance to Title Match

Kozon knocks down career high 19 kills

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DENVER, Colo. - Middle Tennessee advance to the championship match of the Sun Belt Conference tournament in dramatic fashion on Friday defeating Florida International 3-1 (30-22, 30-26, 22-30, 30-23). The Blue Raiders were led by freshman Izabela Kozon who had a career high 19 kills with just four errors for a .406 hitting percentage. Kozon also scored a team high 19.5 points for Middle Tennessee. "This was a great finish for us. I couldn't be prouder of our team. We didn't play well in game three after two outstanding game in one and two but we game back and played a great game four to win the match," head coach Matt Peck said. Sophomore Ashley Mead knocked down 17 kills in the match to add assistance to the offense. Mead also had three block assists on the defensive side of the ball. Junior Ashley Asberry left Thursday's match due to an injury but returned to the court on Friday recorded 13 kills for a .524 hitting percentage. Junior Ashley Adams added 12 kills of her own. Adams had 12 digs and three block assists to add assistance on defense. "What a way to end the match, Ashley Adams solo blocking their best player to win the match was awesome. This was a great match for us and I am actually glad we got challenged there. We needed a match like that going into the finals here either against a really good Denver team or a very good Western Kentucky team," Peck said. Defensively Asberry joined with senior Quanshell Scott to lead the Blue Raiders as each had four block assists in the match. Scott also had nine kills in the match. "Quan stepped it up quite a bit. Iza and Ashley Mead in games one, two and four were doing a great job. Right at the end of the match Iza got some big kills that were huge for us to win the match. I don't expect freshman to win matches for us that is what seniors and juniors are for and Mead and Quan had big finishes for us," Peck said As a team, Middle Tennessee had a hitting percentage of .391 with 72 kills. Defensively, the Blue Raiders were out blocked by the

Golden Panthers who had 13 total blocks compared to Middle Tennessee's nine. Yarimar Rosa led the Golden Panthers with 24 kills for a .340 hitting percentage and saw assistance from Olga Vergun with 14 kills. The two teams traded points to begin the match but then the Blue Raiders began to pull ahead taking a four-point lead, 13-9. Middle Tennessee continued to play well as it extended its lead to six, 17-11. The Blue Raiders maintained their success in game one holding the Golden Panthers to just four points while taking an eight-point lead, 23-15. To begin game two, Middle Tennessee picked up right where it left off as it jumped out to a five-point lead, 6-1. The Blue Raiders held FIU to just three more points while extending its lead to eight, 12-4. The Golden Panthers could never get anything going and the Blue Raiders took advantage extending the lead to 11, 17-6. Middle Tennessee held the Golden Panthers to just 16 points in game two to take a 2-0 lead in the match. Kozon led the Blue Raiders through two games with 12 kills and no errors as she posted a hitting percentage of .857. Mead also added assistance with a .583 hitting percentage with nine kills. Middle Tennessee also had seven blocks in the first two games while FIU only had one. FIU regrouped during the intermission jumping out to a six-point lead, 10-4 while the Blue Raiders were trying to establish a rhythm. Middle Tennessee continued to battle keeping the score within five and not allowing the Golden Panthers to extend its lead, 16-11. The Blue Raiders could not crack FIU in game three as they continued to perform well and keep Middle Tennessee from posting points, 24-18. Then FIU took a seven-point lead late in the game, 28-21 as the Blue Raiders battled to stay alive. FIU held on to force a fourth game topping the Blue Raiders, 30-22. The Blue Raiders had no blocks in game three while FIU had four. Also the Golden Panthers posted a match high 22 kills in game three to take the game holding Middle Tennessee to just 16 kills in the game. "I told our team going in the locker room this is too good of a team for them to roll over and die. They are going to play their best right now. I still think in the back o our minds our team thought the match was over," Peck said. We fought back a little bit in game three but everything was working for them in game three. Everything was working for them in game four too but we picked up our defense." FIU continued its momentum from game three into game four as it jumped out to a 6-2 lead. The Blue Raiders battled back from a four-point deficit to tie the game at 13. The two teams continued to trade points with neither taking more than a one-point lead, 20-19 MT. Then the Blue Raiders caught their stride to take a late five-point lead, 26-21. Middle Tennessee will be back in action in the championship match of the tournament on Sunday Nov. 17 at 4 p.m. when they will play Western Kentucky, who defeated Denver 3-1. Live broadcasts of Middle Tennessee's matches at the Sun Belt Conference tournament will be available on www.goblueraiders.com. Live streaming of the tournament will also be available through the Sun Belt Conference website, www.sunbeltsports.org.

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