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Spirited Blue Raiders successfully avenge loss to Belmont

Yates leads four players with game-high 20 points

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - What a difference 16 days can make.

Middle Tennessee put together its most complete and spirited game of the early season to beat Belmont, 86-80, in overtime at Murphy Center Wednesday and in the process the Blue Raiders avenged an 85-62 setback to the same Bruins just 16 days earlier in Nashville.

[Desmond Yates](#) led four Middle Tennessee players in double figures with 20 points - 18 coming in the second half - while [Kevin Kanaskie](#) and [Theryn Hudson](#) supplied 16 points each and [Demetrius Green](#) tallied 10 in the back-and-forth affair. [Nigel Johnson](#) tallied nine points and six assists and seven rebounds, Dino Hair finished with eight and [Josh Sain](#) added seven to pace the balanced Blue Raider attack.

"The first time we played Belmont they beat us in every facet possible," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "I thought their team played extremely hard but our team had a little more identity offensively - we went inside-out and we got to the free-throw line. We've got a lot of work to do defensively but at times we got some key stops."

The second time around offered a complete reversal for the Blue Raiders (3-5) against Belmont. Middle Tennessee dominated the boards, 42-27, after being outrebounded 40-24 at Belmont (6-4), which drained 15 3-pointers in the setback.

The exciting and well-played game featured 13 lead changes, eight ties and the largest lead for either team was eight the entire game. Tough practices and an ability to get those practices into the game was evident Wednesday as Davis craftily worked his team and the players were rewarded with victory for their hard work as they sought redemption vs. the Bruins.

In one of the gustiest performances by a Blue Raider in some time, Kanaskie played 31 minutes and dished out four assists, pulled six rebounds and made one big play after another despite playing at roughly "60 percent" with a hip flexor. He was listed as doubtful on the injury report Tuesday and Davis didn't expect him to play as late as Wednesday afternoon.

"What can you say about Kevin? There was no way he was going to play in that game, and he comes out today and starts warming up and I wasn't going to play him. He's over there saying, 'Coach, I want to try it.' I thought I'd just put him in for a minute and take him back out just to prove the point, but he just kept playing. For him to do that, to play 31 minutes, that kind of speaks to Kevin. I always have a tremendous amount of respect for Kevin, but it goes up a notch doing what he did. I just hope that he can recover and be fine the next couple of days."

Middle Tennessee trailed 68-63 with 4:39 remaining but Yates led a run with four points and an assist as the Blue Raider pulled to within 68-67 with 3:23 remaining in regulation. Perhaps one of the big turning points in the game occurred with 1:30 remaining in regulation when Belmont had possession and a 71-69 lead. Keaton Belcher drained a long 3-pointer to put the Bruins on top 74-69 - or so it seemed. Instead, of the basket counting Belmont was called for a technical foul for having six men on the court.

The basket was wiped out and Kanaskie hit both free throws to tie the game 71-71. After a Belmont turnover, Green hit two free throws to put the Blue Raiders on top 73-71 and after the Blue Raiders forced a second straight turnover, Kanaskie hit one of two charity tosses to extend the lead to 74-71 with 39 seconds remaining.

Justin Hare answered with a 3-pointer with eight seconds remaining to tie the game and Johnson's layup with 2 seconds remaining went off the rim to force overtime. The Blue Raiders scored the first four points of overtime and never looked back as they notched the much-needed win.

Hudson was a beast inside, particularly in the first half. The 6-foot-10 center's 16 points were a career high and his nine rebounds tied a career high. He was 8-of-11 from the field, establishing a career high for field goals made. Yates was equally devastating in the second half when he was 7-of-9 from the field and dominated play in the paint. Johnson's six assists were a career high. Hair's energy was also paramount for Middle Tennessee.



Theryn Hudson, left, posts Will Peebles in the Blue Raiders 86-80 win vs. Belmont Wednesday. Hudson had a career-high 16 points in the win. (Bradley Lambert)

The Blue Raiders shot a sizzling 92.9 percent (26-of-28) from the charity stripe, serving as an indication of how physical they were and how successfully they were able to execute their offense from the inside out.

Middle Tennessee will face No. 2 Memphis at the Sommet Center in Nashville Saturday at 6:05 p.m.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes

Head Coach Kermit Davis

On tonight's win

"I've been coaching here for a little over five years, and I thought that from a fan's perspective that was probably one of the most exciting college games that I've been a part of here. I thought Belmont played well. They make 15 3s in a game and the other team wins, that doesn't happen very often, so I think we beat a quality team. I'm so happy for our players because I know they've really worked and we grinded them the last 10 or 12 days, hit them hard, and they responded. They needed something good to happen, just to get in that locker room happy. We've still got a lot of work to do, but it was a good feeling tonight."

On the difference between tonight and the first game

"The first game Belmont beat us in every facet possible - toughness, shooting, offense - at their place. It wasn't even close. We didn't beat them like that obviously because of the score, and I thought their team played extremely hard, but our team had a little more identity offensively - we went inside, out, got to the free-throw line. We've got a lot of work to do defensively, but at times we got some key stops."

On [Kevin Kanaskie](#)

"What can you say about Kevin? There was no way he was going to play in that game, and he comes out today and starts warming up and I wasn't going to play him. He's over there saying, 'Coach, I want to try it.' I thought I'd just put him in for a minute and take him back out just to prove the point, but he just kept playing. For him to do that, to play 31 minutes, that kind of speaks to Kevin. I always have a tremendous amount of respect for Kevin, but it goes up a notch doing what he did. I just hope that he can recover and be fine the next couple of days."

On the contributions off the bench

"We've talked about how their bench just wore us out over there. I thought we got really good play from [Josh Sain](#) in the first half. I thought that off the bench Dino Hair was active, went to the offensive boards, flew around, and made some really nice plays. He was really effective off the bench. We're kind of a balanced scoring team. We've almost got five or six guys in double figures. We haven't talked about Theryn - Sixteen (points) and nine (rebounds) in 34 minutes, and he had some tough matchups. This was one of those games where you don't know how much you can play 'T' because he's out there trying to extend and guard these guys who can make 3s, so I was really pleased with his effort."

On the mental state of the team

"Everyone asks if your team is having fun and no, you don't have fun losing. Sometimes it's really hard to get your guys to go during exam week, and we hit them hard. I'm so happy for them. It's a small step but they feel good about themselves that their hard work paid off, so you'd better believe that will help us. Whatever happens at Memphis - it could be the (major) college basketball upset or something scary may happen, but we've got to leave that and get right to Tuesday (against Florida International), because that's what we've all been trying to play for like everyone else."

Junior guard [Kevin Kanaskie](#)

On the significance of the win

"It's a big win. We needed this win. Belmont's a real good team, and they embarrassed us at their place. We made a lot of progress, but we've still got some work to do."

On the keys to victory

"Belmont's really good, and you can see it. They can shoot it - all five guys can shoot the 3. Theryn (Hudson) did a good job guarding, so did Boogie ([Desmond Yates](#)). One day in practice all we did was offense. I think our offense is the best when we move the ball and everybody touches it."

Junior guard [Demetrius Green](#)

On his adjustments

"My outside shot wasn't really on, so I felt like if I go to the free throw line I could get our team some points on the board. I started off bad on the defensive end, but Coach just told me to keep on playing, pick it up, so I got more aggressive."

Sophomore forward [Desmond Yates](#)

On his play

"I was more aggressive in the second half. Coach came to me and said I was being too passive, so I came out more aggressive and my teammates got me the ball."

On the road ahead

"I feel like we got over the hump a little bit, but we're nowhere near where we need to be or where we're going to be. We had a 10-day layoff, we worked hard everyday, and I think we made a lot of progress, but we still have a lot of work to do."

Belmont Head Coach Rick Byrd

On the having a technical foul because of six men on the floor

"It's illegal because you can't have six guys out there. That's the first time I remember that ever happening since I've been at Belmont. It happened before with the school I was previously with 24 years ago. It's very indicative of the things we are doing poorly as a team. One of those is simply communication. When you have two guys at the table they should know who to go in for. If you send them in, they should know who they are going to go get. There was a timeout, a surprise timeout and they needed to communicate who has who. There wasn't any communication. We can't say we would have scored the three. They certainly wouldn't have made those two free throws. It's disappointing and ultimately our responsibility as a staff is to see what is happening on the floor. We are just not a sound basketball team and that's a good example. Communication is what good teams do and we didn't."

On the play of Middle Tennessee

"Middle Tennessee outplayed us the whole night. If we didn't make 15 [3-pointers] and shoot exceptionally well, they would have beaten us by 15. Their effort was better and they were more physical. They wanted to win the game more than we did. They were better prepared from a coaching standpoint. They shot 28 free throws and we shot nine. That's not indicative of the officiating. It's indicative of their approach to the game and how we backed down from them."

On Middle Tennessee being more physical than the previous game

"I knew they've had a break and had a poor start to the season. It's very much different than what Kermit [Davis] is used to and the kind of teams he has had in the past. When you have the opportunity to have nine or ten practices, he had a chance to rejuvenate his basketball team. When you are playing good, you sometimes don't want those long periods of time off. When you're playing poorly, it's an opportunity to put those losses in the back of you're mind. Those guys are young and they have forgotten the loss to Tennessee and our game. They were a better team from the beginning and I think they have been all year long."

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