Blue Raiders get defensive in 61-57 win vs. FAU

Team improves to 3-0 in SBC home games

January 9, 2008 · MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Four players scored double figures to pace a balanced attack as Middle Tennessee turned back Florida Atlantic, 61-57, and improved to 3-0 in Sun Belt Conference games at Murphy Center.

Sophomore standout Desmond Yates led the Blue Raiders with 14 points and tied his career high with seven rebounds, while Kevin Kanaskie finished with 10 points; however, one of the biggest sparks was provided off the bench as reserves Demetrius Green and Josh Sain added 11 and 10 points, respectively. Nigel Johnson finished with seven points and six caroms as Middle Tennessee won it second in succession.

"I'm proud of our team and the way we responded in this game," Middle Tennessee head coach Kermit Davis said. "It was a tough win, a hard-earned win against a Florida Atlantic team that played a strong defensive game."

Florida Atlantic was led by Jeff Parmer's 16 points and Carlos Monroe added 15 for the Owls, who were limited to 18.2 percent from 3-point range and 41 percent overall from the field. Like Middle Tennessee, the Owls were defensive-minded in the rugged contest and limited the Blue Raiders to

40 percent (21-of-53) shooting from the field and 29 percent from 3-point range.

The difference; however, was the Blue Raiders continued to play with a strong defensive mentality in conference play. Middle Tennessee has held four of its five Sun Belt opponents to 63 points or less and league foes are averaging just 61.4 points against the Blue Raiders. The opposition is also shooting just 43 percent from the field, including 29 percent from 3-point range.

"I believe our last three practices have been the best of the season, maybe the best since I've been here," Kanaskie said. "The focus was there and it paid off in this game. We played solid defense and our team chemistry continues to improve."

The Blue Raiders (6-9, 3-2) started strong and quickly erased Florida Atlantic's early 4-0 lead, its only advantage in the game, and they led 30-19 with 4:35 remaining, but the final four-plus minutes belonged to the Owls (4-12, 0-5) as they closed to within 30-25 and were successful in getting both Yates and Theryn Hudson in foul trouble. Yates picked up his third foul late in the first half and Hudson followed with his third just seconds later before a substitute could get in the game to replace him.

Middle Tennessee played in excessive foul trouble throughout the second half but it never lost its poise, particularly after the visitors had closed to within 39-36 with the ball and 12:13 remaining.

That's when Sain and Green ignited a 9-3 run that culminated with Sain's 17-foot jumper to extend the lead to 48-38 with 8:31 remaining. Sain had five points, an assist and one steal in the decisive stretch and the Blue Raiders controlled the game down the stretch.

Middle Tennessee will return to action when it travels to Troy Jan. 16.

Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Kermit Davis
On tonight's win:
"Give Florida Atlantic a lot of credit. I thought they played tonight with a real purpose defensively. They got (Paul) Graham back and he's starting to get back into playing shape. They moved (Jeff) Palmer to the four and I thought that makes them a lot better because he can really shoot it and that stretches your defense. I was proud of our team. We had a chance right there to maybe blow it out a little in the first half, and we kind of got stalemated offensively. I give Florida Atlantic a lot of credit for that. But what I'm proud of is that it didn't go right offensively and we still got stops and found ways to win the game, fighting big foul trouble with Theryn (Hudson) and Boogie (Desmond Yates) and Nigel (Johnson). It was a typical Sun Belt game where games get even, and (it came) down to the last five minutes."

On the team's locker room situation and the players being able to move back into their locker room after spending the last week in a different location:
"I walked in the locker room after the game and they all had their garbage bags over their shoulders. They said 'We're going to the Squad Room,' and I said 'Okay, that's great.' It kind of took a life of its own, and I think the players had a little bit of fun with it, and I do think they learned and we talked about appreciation (It) hopefully hit home, not just about basketball but about everything that people at Middle Tennessee do to help student athletes with."

On finding a way to win

"I don't think we could have won this game three weeks ago. Anytime Boogie and Theryn got in foul trouble and Nigel got in foul trouble, and what happens is we're not as good. Kevin (Kanaskie) goes 3-for-12, 3-of-6 from the line. With all that, to still find a way to grind it out (was encouraging)."

On the play of Josh Sain
"He'll compete around the basket and he'll rebound. Tonight, what was good about it (was) 22 minutes and no turnovers. I thought every shot he took tonight was a good shot. He's maturing. Everybody goes through it, and we're glad that he's playing better. Josh's main thing that he's trying to figure out is eliminating bad plays. Once he does, his talent level will take over."

On having better practices
"The last week and a half I've seen our practices, and our camaraderie, and our verbal communication get better. It's huge for us. Especially when Calvin (O' Neil) went down... he was kind of a rock. Whenever our team would be going through a period of time in practice, his energy level would just go and go and go. It took us a little bit. We're becoming a better practice team. We're not close yet, but we are getting better with that."

Junior guard Kevin Kanaskie
On the team's progress
"We've still got some work to do. We're good when we share the ball, we just go through a couple of minute periods (where we lapse) At Tennessee we were awful team chemistry-wise. Now we're definitely better, we just need to keep getting there."

On getting back in the locker room
"He told us after we won two games in a row we'd be back in, but you never know with Coach. Tonight he said we were out of there."

On having a week between games
"I think it'll help. The last three days of practice have been the best of the year, no question. (We've been) more focused. More practice will help."

On the play of Josh Sain
"He played the floor well tonight. He can score, and he's a natural problem for the other team. He came from a high school where he could do it all, and he's starting to understand that everything in the college game is a big difference. He's really helped our team, no question."

Junior guard Demetrius Green
On tonight's win
"A win is a win. We play hard at points, but we really didn't do too well at the start. We fought through it."

Florida Atlantic Head Coach Rex Walters
On tonight's game
"We had an opportunity to take this one, but I'm really proud of our team's effort. I think the most important thing is the Troy game coming up. I think we need to continue to stay the course defensively. We are two or three plays away from coming away with a win tonight. The margin of error is so small. We'll come back tomorrow and try to get better."

On getting close to the elusive conference win

"Obviously we didn't make enough plays down the stretch to get the win. To me, it's not like you are climbing this huge mountain. It's a two possession game for us. We were a backdoor lay-up and an offensive rebound away. It is little things like that that hurts you in a game like that when you are playing the 50s or 60s range. A four-point lead feels like a 10-point lead. You have to grind it out. The shots will hopefully fall in the future and I believe they will if we continue to take good shots. In the first half, we rushed a few. You've got to be solid in effort and execution."

On the play of Xavier Perkins off the bench

"Xavier [Perkins] gave us some good effort against [Theryn] Hudson. We wanted him to play in matchups like this, but he hasn't been able to because of injuries and other things. If he continues to perform like this and practice like that, we'll play him more."

Printed on December 10, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/29422