Blue Raiders turn back Troy, 65-64, for third-straight win

Yates' career-high 24 leads way; Kanaskie's free throws seal triumph

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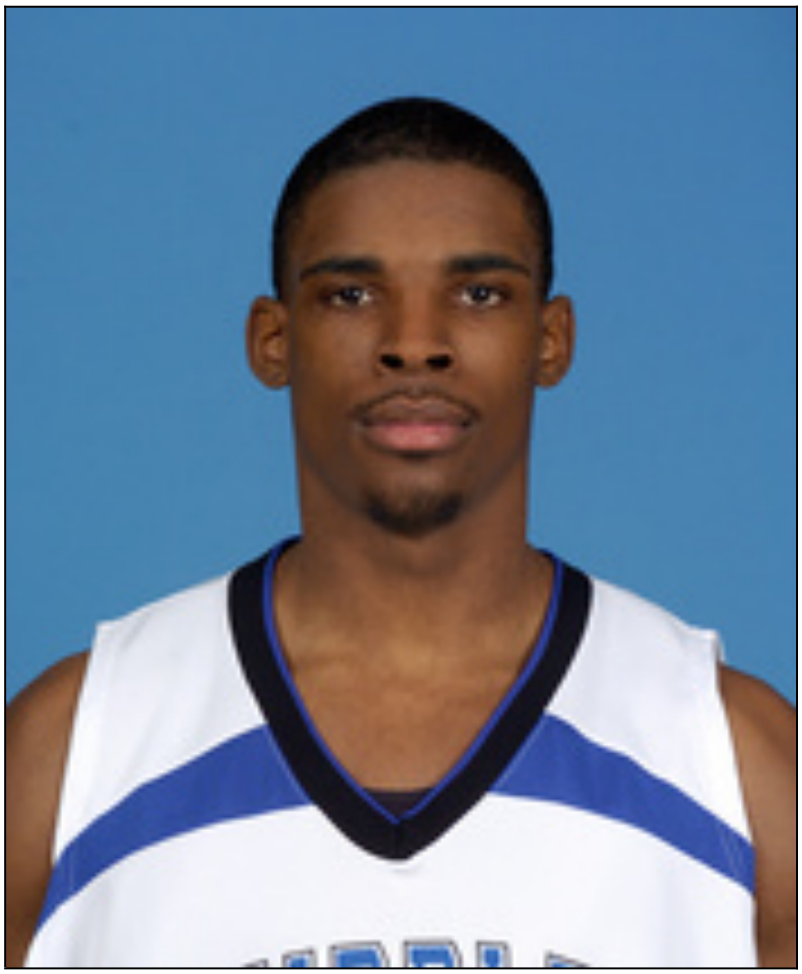

TROY, Ala. - Kevin Kanaskie hit two free throws with four seconds remaining and O'Darien Bassett's off-balance 3-pointer at the buzzer was off the mark as Middle Tennessee secured its third straight win, a hair-raising 65-64 triumph at Trojan Arena Wednesday night. While Kanaskie came up big at the end, sophomore standout Desmond Yates continued his assault on Sun Belt Conference opponents with a career-high 24 points on 11-of-15 shooting from the field to raise his scoring average against league foes to 18.8 points per game. Yates turned in his ninth career 20-point game and the Blue Raiders are 7-2 in those games. Demetrius Green added 14 points and a career-high nine rebounds and Kanaskie finished with nine points. Nigel Johnson finished with seven points, six rebounds and four assists in a solid all-around game. "I'm very proud of this basketball team and the way our guys handled themselves in this game," Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis said. "We are continuing to show improvement and putting it together. I like the way our team is playing and approaching practice and games." Middle Tennessee (7-9, 4-2) won its third straight Sun Belt game and is tied for third overall in the conference standings and it did so at a place where few opponents have tasted success this season as Troy (8-9, 1-5) suffered just its second loss in nine home games this season. What's more is the fact that Middle Tennessee continued its superlative defensive play by holding the Sun Belt's top offensive team to 18 points below its season average in order to notch its 22nd conference road win under Davis - which is tied for the most victories away from home by SBC members since Davis' hiring in 2002-03. "We knew this would be a difficult game because Troy

is a solid team and they are very, very hard to beat in their home gym," Yates said. "We put together another strong game, continued to play strong defense and we are playing with a lot of confidence right now. This team's demeanor is good right now and it shows." That winning demeanor was never more evident than heading down the stretch with the game hanging in the balance Wednesday. The game featured 13 lead changes - all in the second half - and seven ties. Yates' 5-footer with 3:06 remaining provided the Blue Raiders a 61-58 lead but Jarvis Acker knocked down a 25-foot 3-pointer at the end of the shot clock against a double team to tie the score, 61-61, with 2:28 remaining. Johnson was fouled at the 1:46 mark and knocked down both charity tosses to give Middle Tennessee a 63-61 lead but Bassett, who scored 25 in the loss, was fouled on the other end and connected on one-of-two attempts to pull his team to within 63-62 with 23 seconds to play. Bassett missed the second attempt and Johnson grabbed the rebound and was immediately fouled. He missed the front end of the one-and-one and Bassett retrieved the rebound and was fouled. Bassett made both attempts to put the Trojans on top 64-63 but Kanaskie was fouled with four seconds remaining as he was penetrating the lane and headed toward the basket. Kanaskie's first attempt bounced around the rim three times before finally rattling through to tie the score, 64-64, and his second attempt was nothing but net to provide the 65-64 advantage. Bassett's long-range attempt at the buzzer was errant and the Blue Raiders secured their third win in succession. "I was a little nervous when the first shot kept bouncing around," Kanaskie said of the free throw. "After the first one went in to tie the game the second was much easier, or it seemed like it. This was a good win for us against a good team. Troy does some things that other teams in our league do not and they are a difficult team but this was a really good team win for us." Middle Tennessee shot 49 percent (22-of-450 and outrebounded the Trojans, 33-29, while holding Troy to 40 percent (21-of-52) from the field, including 10-of-23 from 3-point range. Yates and Green helped ignite a strong start by Middle Tennessee as they combined for 24 first-half points. Green established a career high with nine rebounds and Yates' 11 field goals were also a career high. With two 3-pointers vs. Troy, Kanaskie moved into a tie with Nod Carter for seventh on the all-time list with 106. Middle Tennessee, which improved to 56-39 all-time under Davis after Jan. 1, will look for its fourth straight win when it plays host to New Orleans Saturday on ESPN Regional. Tipoff for the game has been moved to 6:05 p.m.

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