

January 18, 2008

Win streak has Blue Raiders among Sun Belt's elite teams

Middle Tennessee seeks fourth-straight win vs. New Orleans Saturday

MT Media Relations

Closer look at New Orleans

New Orleans enters the game at 13-5 overall, 3-3 in Sun Belt play, under first-year Head Coach Joe Pasternack. The Privateers are led by senior guard Bo McCalebb, who averages 21.9 points per game and became the Sun Belt's all-time leading scorer with 23 points in the win at North Texas Thursday. McCalebb surpassed the previous mark of 2,319 career points by former South Florida standout Charlie Bradley, who had held the record since 1985. McCalebb enters the Middle Tennessee game with 2,332 career points. The Privateers are an experienced team with four seniors in the projected starting lineup. Forward Kyndall Dykes also averages double figures at 14.1 points per game. The Privateers have key non-conference wins against then No. 21 N.C. State and at Colorado.

Series favors Blue Raiders of late

New Orleans owns a 7-5 lead in the all-time series against Middle Tennessee; however, the series has favored the Blue Raiders of late. Middle Tennessee has won five of the previous six meetings and the Blue Raiders are 4-1 against the Privateers under Head Coach Kermit Davis. The teams have met eight times as Sun Belt Conference members with Middle Tennessee owning a 5-3 advantage in those contests. The series, which began in 1982, saw New Orleans win the first six meetings between the teams before the tide turned in the Blue Raiders' favor. Middle Tennessee is 2-3 in five meetings against New Orleans at the Murphy Center.

Three constitutes a streak

Middle Tennessee's current three-game win streak is its longest of the season and marks the 11th time in five-plus seasons the Blue Raiders have won three straight under Head Coach Kermit Davis. The Blue Raiders won four straight under Davis during the 2005-06 season and they have enjoyed three five-game win streaks under the sixth-year head coach (2002-03, and twice during the 2004-05 season). The three five-game winning streaks represent the longest for the Blue Raiders since they won six straight in 1997-98.

Non-conference schedule top 10 nationally

Middle Tennessee Coach Kermit Davis has not hesitated to put his team up against tough non-conference schedules in his six seasons leading the Blue Raiders and it seems to pay off as the grueling early-season slate has generally prepared the team for league play. This season has been no different as Middle Tennessee's non-conference strength of schedule is ranked No. 8 nationally out of 341 Division I teams in the Pomeroy ratings, and it is rated the most difficult schedule among all Sun Belt teams by Pomeroy, Sagarin and RealTime RPI ratings. The tough schedule has helped prepared the Blue Raiders for the league race as they enter the New Orleans game with a 4-2 mark. This season; however, the Blue Raiders have faced the daunting task without two-thirds of their projected starting backcourt as all-conference performer Adam Vogelsberg opted not to play his senior season due to excessive injuries and surgeries and junior [Calvin O'Neil](#) suffered a season-ending knee injury in the season opener.

These numbers more like it

Middle Tennessee's defense has made steady improvement throughout the season and the results are paying off in Sun Belt play. After giving up 75 or more points seven times to non-conference foes the Blue Raiders have held five of the six league teams they have faced to 63 points or less. Non-conference foes averaged 77 points and shot 49 percent against the Blue Raiders, but Middle Tennessee is allowing just 61.8 points in Sun Belt play - which ranks second in league-games only for scoring defense. The Blue Raiders rank fourth in league-games only for field goal percentage defense (.427 percent) and they are fifth for 3-point field goal percentage defense (.321).

Blue Raiders reverse fortunes, enjoy Sun Belt success under Davis

After struggling in their first two years as a member of the Sun Belt the Blue Raiders have found success in the league under sixth-year Head Coach Kermit Davis. In fact, Middle Tennessee has the fourth-best winning percentage (57 percent) and the fourth-most wins (51) among current SBC members since the start of the 2002-03 season - Davis' first leading the Blue Raiders. Western Kentucky (65), Louisiana-Lafayette (60) and South Alabama (53) are the only SBC members with more league wins than Middle Tennessee during this stretch. Prior to Davis' hiring, Middle Tennessee had seven SBC wins in the two previous seasons combined.

Middle Tennessee among Sun Belt's best teams winning on the road

One of the biggest reasons for Middle Tennessee's turn-around in the Sun Belt has been its ability to win on the road. Prior to Kermit Davis' hiring in 2002, Middle Tennessee was 2-17 on the road in SBC games but the Blue Raiders have 22 SBC road wins



Junior guard Nigel Johnson is among Sun Belt leaders in assists and assist/turnover ratio. (Bradley Lambert)

since - tied for the most road victories of any SBC member during his five-plus seasons leading the program. Middle Tennessee, South Alabama, Louisiana-Lafayette and Western Kentucky are the only Sun Belt teams with road records of .500 or better since the start of the 2002-03 season. The Blue Raiders were 5-4 in SBC road games in 2006-07.

Kanaskie climbing career charts

[Kevin Kanaskie](#) is making a move on the Middle Tennessee career records charts with two seasons remaining. The State College, Pa., led the Blue Raiders with nine assists vs. Denver (01/05/08) and moved into sixth on the career assists list with 306, passing James Johnson (313) in the process, and now has 321. He needs six more assists to pass Chris Rainey for fifth all-time. He is one of eight Blue Raiders to have 300 or more assists in a career. Kanaskie moved into a tie for seventh on the career 3-point field goals made list with 106 after connecting for two against Troy (01/16/08). He has connected on 22 long-range shots so far this season and is one of only 10 players in school history to have 100 or more 3-pointers during their career. Kanaskie has hit at least one 3-pointer in 34 of the last 37 games, dating to last season. The junior guard surpassed the 650-point mark of his career with nine at Troy (01/16/08).

Hudson cracks career marks

Center [Theryn Hudson](#) is starting to come into his own as one of the SBC's top big men in his third season in the Blue Raider program. Hudson's .584 career field goal percentage is third on the all-time Middle Tennessee list. He is third in the Sun Belt for field goal percentage this season with a .608 percent showing. Hudson is also tied for eighth on the career blocks list at Middle Tennessee with 47.

Kanaskie proves it's not whether you start

Junior guard [Kevin Kanaskie](#) had his streak of 50 consecutive starts snapped when he was not in the starting lineup vs. Belmont (12/12) after suffering a hip flexor earlier in the week. He was not expected to play against the Bruins Wednesday but he urged coach Kermit Davis to give him a chance. Davis did and Kanaskie came off the bench, played 31 minutes and scored a season-high 16 points in the Blue Raiders' 86-80 overtime win. Kanaskie was 11-of-13 from the free throw line, establishing career highs for makes and attempts from the charity stripe, and he tied his season high with six rebounds in the triumph.

No sophomore slump for Yates

Forward [Desmond Yates](#) enjoyed a successful debut campaign at the collegiate level in 2006-07, finishing the season as Middle Tennessee's second-leading scorer at 10.9 points per game and shooting 54 percent from the field. He was one of the Sun Belt's top freshmen and played in all 32 games for the Blue Raiders, starting 18. The Somerville, Tenn., native has improved his numbers across the board in 2007-08. He is currently the team's leading scorer at 13.9 points per game and he is averaging a hefty 18.8 points in Sun Belt games, which is fourth among league players. Yates is ranked 10th in the league scoring race for all games and he is currently among the SBC leaders in field goal percentage (fifth, .567), and free-throw percentage (fifth, .854).

Yates' scoring binges key victories

Desmond "Boogie" Yates established a new career high with 24 points on 11-of-15 shooting in Middle Tennessee's 65-64 win at Troy (1/16/08), marking the ninth time the high-scoring sophomore has topped the 20-point mark. The Blue Raiders are 7-2 in those games. They were 3-1 last season and they are 4-1 so far this season when he scores 20 or more. The only losses were to Arkansas State last season and at Houston earlier this season. Yates has registered five of his nine games of 20 or more points in the last 10 games. He scored 20-plus in consecutive games for the second time in his career with 21 at Houston (12/1) and 20 against Belmont (12/12). Yates has scored double figures in 30 of 48 career games. He surpassed the 550-point mark in his 48th career game vs. Troy and currently has 572 points.

Yates not turning down charity in recent games

Ranked among the Sun Belt's leaders all season in free throw percentage, sophomore [Desmond Yates'](#) recent success at the line has allowed him to continually climb up the list. Yates had a stretch of 14 consecutive makes snapped earlier this season at South Alabama. He has connected on 32 of his last 35 attempts (91 percent) at the charity stripe. For the season, Yates is connecting on 85 percent (35-of-41) of his free-throw attempts, which is good for fifth in the Sun Belt for all games, and his 86 percent showing in league games only (19-22) is seventh in the league standings. Yates shot just 71.6 percent (48-of-67) from the free-throw line last season as a freshman.

Hudson enjoying career year

Middle Tennessee junior center [Theryn Hudson](#) has continued his development under Head Coach Kermit Davis and is enjoying a career year. Hudson, who only started playing basketball competitively as a junior at nearby La Vergne High School, has shown significant increases in all statistical categories. He had a career-high 13 rebounds at Western Kentucky (1/2/08). The 6-foot-10 Hudson is third in the Sun Belt in shooting percentage with a personal-best 61.0 percent (61-100) showing and his 5.8 rebounds per game are 13th in the SBC and 2.3 caroms per game higher than his career average of 3.5. Hudson also has developed into a more consistent scorer and his 9.6 per game average is almost four points higher than his 5.8 career scoring average. He has registered six of his 14 career double-figure scoring games this season.

Hudson has been lights out from field

Junior [Theryn Hudson](#) is fourth in the Sun Belt in field goal percentage with a 61.0 percent clip (61-of-100) showing; and his 58.5 career field goal percentage is third all-time at Middle Tennessee. The 6-foot-10 center has been on a tear since the start of Sun Belt play. During this six-game stretch, Hudson is shooting 61 percent (20-of-33) from the field. He was 8-of-11 from the field in a

win vs. Belmont. He is shooting 60.8 percent (62-of-102), which is third in the league standings.

Hudson, Yates form dynamic duo

Middle Tennessee improved to 4-0 this season when center [Theryn Hudson](#) and forward [Desmond Yates](#) both score in double figures following their performances in Middle Tennessee's 68-50 win against Denver (1/5/08). Yates tied his career high of 23 points on 10-of-13 shooting from the field, while Hudson added 11 points and led the team in rebounds with six. They have also scored double figures in the same games vs. Tennessee Wesleyan (Yates -14, Hudson - 11), vs. Belmont (Yates - 20, Hudson - 16), and Florida International (Yates - 23, Hudson - 16).

Success begins inside for Blue Raiders

Middle Tennessee has been its most successful when [Theryn Hudson](#) and [Desmond Yates](#) play well. In the Blue Raiders' seven wins, the inside duo is averaging 29.0 points and 10.3 rebounds; however, in the team's nine losses they have combined to average just 18.7 points and 8.8 rebounds.

Lending a helping hand

Blue Raider guards [Kevin Kanaskie](#) and [Nigel Johnson](#) represent two of the top assist men in the Sun Belt Conference. Kanaskie ranks third in the Sun Belt in assists with 3.88 per game and Johnson is sixth in the league standings with 3.25 helpers per game. They are also among league leaders in assist/turnover ratio with Johnson ranking seventh (1.44) and Kanaskie 11th (1.32).

Blue Raiders enjoy ringing in New Year

One constant for Middle Tennessee under sixth-year Head Coach Kermit Davis has been steady improvement throughout the season. The Blue Raiders have a 56-39 mark under Davis after Jan. 1 for a 58 percent winning ledger and they have never had a losing mark after the start of a New Year under Davis. The Blue Raiders have registered double figure victories after Jan. 1 in four of the previous five seasons under Davis and the one season they did not - 2005-06 - they still won nine games. They are 3-1 in January so far this season.

Middle Tennessee generally plays well with lead

Middle Tennessee has been solid at protecting leads in Head Coach Kermit Davis' six seasons. The Blue Raiders are 68-13 under Davis when they lead at the half, including a 5-1 mark this season, and they have won a staggering 87 percent (78-12) of the 90 games in which they have led with five minutes remaining, including a perfect 6-0 mark this season.

Kanaskie in game for long haul

Junior guard [Kevin Kanaskie](#) never left the court in Middle Tennessee's 65-64 win at Troy (1/16/08) and established a season high for minutes played with 40. The State College, Pa., native has been a workhorse for the Blue Raiders after the last two seasons. His 34.6 minutes-per-game this season is third in the Sun Belt and he has logged 35 or more minutes nine times. Kanaskie played 1,184 minutes in 2006-07, which were the most minutes played by a Blue Raider in program history. His 37.0 minute-per-game average in 2006-07 was fourth-most for a single season. His career high for minutes played is 44 against South Alabama in an overtime win in the Sun Belt Tournament quarterfinals in 2006-07. Kanaskie's 2,355 minutes played are currently 14th most all-time at Middle Tennessee and his 31.0 career average is 10th all-time.

Guards on the 'rebound'

Middle Tennessee's guards have been among the top collection of starting perimeter players in regard to rebounding this season. Junior [Demetrius Green](#) had a career-high nine rebounds to lead the Blue Raiders in that category at Troy (1/16/08) and he is currently 19th overall in the league standings for Sun Belt games only in rebounding with 4.8 per game. Good rebounding guards are the norm under Head Coach Kermit Davis at Middle Tennessee and this year is no different as two of the top three rebounders on the team, and three of the top five, are guards. Green is second on the team in rebounding in all games at 4.5 per game, while [Kevin Kanaskie](#)'s 4.0 caroms per game are third. [Nigel Johnson](#) averages 3.0 rebounds, which is fifth on the team. The three Blue Raider starting guards (Green, Johnson, Kanaskie) combine to average 11.5 rebounds per game in all games and 12.2 in conference games only. Green has pulled five or more rebounds in a game nine times, Kanaskie has five or more in six games, and Johnson has pulled five or more four times.

Sain providing big spark off Blue Raider bench

Freshman [Josh Sain](#) has been a consistent contributor off the Blue Raider bench and he enjoyed one of his best game so far with 13 points, four rebounds, and 20 minutes - all career highs - vs. South Alabama (12/22/07). Sain once again established a new career high for minutes played in his next game when he logged 26 vs. Austin Peay to go along with 10 points. It marked the first time he has scored double figures in consecutive games in his young college career. He led the Blue Raiders in scoring and rebounding for the first time in his career at South Alabama. He had a career-high five rebounds vs. Denver (01/05/08). Sain is averaging 6.3 points and his 40 percent (14-of-35) shooting clip from beyond the 3-point is second among all Blue Raider guards.

Blue Raiders enjoy one of best shooting halves ever

Middle Tennessee's 72.7 second-half shooting percentage against Denver was the third-highest in school history for one half and the highest shooting mark for a Blue Raider team in more than 25 years. The single-half record for field goal percentage is 83 percent vs. Akron (2/4/82) and second is 80 percent vs. Tennessee Tech (1/8/81). Each of those marks were also established in the second half. Middle Tennessee's hot-shooting performance in the second half included hitting 13-of-14 shots during one stretch. After the first shot of the half was off the mark, Middle Tennessee players hit six straight before their next miss and then followed

with seven consecutive makes before missing another field. Yates was 5-of-5 in the second half, while [Demetrius Green](#) was 5-of-6 and [Kevin Kanaskie](#) was 3-of-4.

Green enjoys complete game vs. Austin Peay

Junior guard [Demetrius Green](#) has provided Middle Tennessee with its most consistent guard play and he delivered his best game as a Blue Raider vs. Austin Peay (12/29/07). Green scored a career-best 24 points - the second-most points by a Blue Raider this season - and he also established career bests for 3-point field goals made (4) and attempted (5). The Lexington, Ky., native was 10-of-13 from the free-throw line, also personal bests.

Blue Raiders are starting to find 3-point stroke

Middle Tennessee knocked down a season-high nine 3-point field goals against Austin Peay (12/29/07) with junior guard [Demetrius Green](#) leading the way with a career-best four treys. The Blue Raiders were 9-of-20 from behind the arc for a 45 percent clip. The nine 3-pointers were the most for the Blue Raiders since they connected for the same amount at Troy (2/22/07) and were just one shy of the most they made in a game all of last season. The Blue Raiders continued their shooting trend vs. Denver when they shot a season-high 62.5 percent beyond the arc (5-of-8). Middle Tennessee's top three shooting games beyond the arc this season have taken place in the last seven contests and the Blue Raiders are shooting 40 percent as a team from 3-point range during this stretch.

What's in a name?

Junior forward [Desmond Yates](#)' nickname is "Boogie," which he says was given to him by his grandmother when he was 1-year-old. Yates isn't sure why his grandmother gave him the particular nickname but he has always liked it and prefers to go by "Boogie," as opposed to Desmond.

Blue Raider defense strong vs. No. 2 Memphis

After being lit up on the scoreboard and in regard to defensive field goal percentage in the early going, Middle Tennessee's defense has been more representative in the last four games. The Blue Raiders continued their strong defensive play against No. 2 Memphis, holding the high-octane Tigers to 65 points, which was almost 20 points below their 82-point-per-game average. The Blue Raiders held the Tigers' two leading scorers - Chris Douglas-Roberts and Derrick Rose to 17 points below their combined season average of 36 points per game between them. After holding Memphis to 65 points, Middle Tennessee clamped down and allowed just 63 points to Florida International.

Blue Raider defense - Part II

Middle Tennessee's defense pitched another gem at Western Kentucky in a 62-51 setback (1/2/08). The Blue Raiders held the high-octane Hilltoppers to 45.3 percent shooting, four 3-pointers, and the 62 points were not only the second fewest they had scored overall all season and the fewest they have scored at Diddle Arena this season. The 62 points were also 17 below their season average of 79 entering the game. Key in the defensive showpiece was the play of [Darren Avery](#) and [Demetrius Green](#), who teamed to limit Courtney Lee to six points - 15 below the 21 he was averaging entering the game.

Blue Raider defense - Part III

Middle Tennessee's trademark defense was once again on display in the 65-64 win at Troy (1/16/08). Troy entered the game as the Sun Belt's top offensive team at 82 points per game but was held almost 20 points below its average. The Blue Raiders held the Trojans to 40 percent shooting from the field and just nine second-half field goals.

Who says you can't get something for free?

Middle Tennessee took advantage of charity in its 86-80 overtime win against Belmont (12/12) when the Blue Raiders shot a sizzling 93 percent (26-of-28) from the charity stripe. In fact, [Kevin Kanaskie](#), who set career marks for free throws made (11) and attempted (13) in the game was the only Blue Raider to miss from the free-throw line. [Demetrius Green](#) was 6-of-6 in the game and [Desmond Yates](#) connected on all four of his attempts. Yates had a stretch of 15 straight free throws made snapped against South Alabama and he has hit 32 of the last 35 overall.

Don't count us out

Middle Tennessee has been a strong offensive team in the second half of games so far this season. The Blue Raiders are averaging 36.1 points after intermission. They have scored 41 or more points in the second half six times, including 51 vs. Tennessee Wesleyan, 48 vs. Appalachian State, 47 vs. San Jose State, 44 vs. Houston, 41 vs. South Alabama, and 41 vs. Denver.

80 points or more is usually good news for Blue Raiders

When Middle Tennessee has been able to light up the scoreboard under Head Coach Kermit Davis the results have been staggering. Middle Tennessee has won 96 percent of the 27 games in which it has scored 80 or more points in Davis' five-plus seasons. The Blue Raiders are 26-1 in such games, including a 2-0 mark this season. The only time Middle Tennessee failed to win under Davis when scoring more than 80 was an 85-83 overtime setback at Western Kentucky, Feb. 24, 2005. The Blue Raiders have won 11 straight overall when scoring 80 or more points.

Outshooting opposition a key

Outshooting the opposition does not guarantee victory for Middle Tennessee but it is a trend that comes as close to perfection as any under coach Kermit Davis. The Blue Raiders are 75-9 overall under Davis when the shooting percentage is higher than the

opponent. Middle Tennessee had won 29 straight when outshooting the opposition before suffering a 75-69 overtime setback to Toledo last season, despite shooting 58 percent from the field. Overall, Middle Tennessee has won 47 of the last 54 games played when it has a higher shooting percentage than the opposition.

Printed on May 22, 2012

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/29508>