Blue Raiders knock off SBC West Division leader, UALR, 63-46

Hudson leads squad to fourth straight win, seventh in nine games

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Four players scored double figures as Middle Tennessee solved UALR's stellar defense in a 63-46 win at Murphy Center Thursday night. Theryn Hudson led a balanced attack with a game-high 14 points on 6-of-9 shooting as the Blue Raiders captured their fourth-straight win and their seventh in nine games.

In addition to Hudson's 14 points, Kevin Kanaskie scored 12 and Nigel Johnson and Desmond Yates added 11 each as Middle Tennessee (11-11, 8-4) knocked off the Sun Belt's West Division leader with timely offense and strong defense of its own.

UALR (14-8, 6-5) came into the game ranked 35th nationally in field goal percentage defense (39.9) and 37th in scoring defense (61.5) but the Blue Raiders shot 50 percent from the field, including 40 percent (6-of-15) from beyond the arc.

In fact, it was Middle Tennessee's defense that made the biggest difference in the game, limiting the Trojans to 32 percent (17-of-53) from the field and just 46 points. The 46 points were the fewest allowed by the Blue Raiders this season and they held the opposition to its lowest field goal

percentage against Middle Tennessee this season.

"I'm proud of our team and the way they played tonight," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "I thought we had several different players step up and contribute against a tough, quality opponent in UALR. We knew it was going to be a tough game and it was. That was about the best we have been offensively when we made that run at the start of the second half. We shared the ball and we made very good decisions, plus we were just solid on the defensive end."

The first half was the rugged defensive battle that was anticipated between the defensive-minded teams as Middle Tennessee carried a 29-20 lead into the half; however, the Blue Raiders turned the game in their favor for good with a 14-0 run to start the second half when they extended the lead to 41-21 on Yates' jumper.

The run continued throughout the first 10 minutes of the second half and Broderick Gilchrest's layup with 10:10 remaining provided the team's biggest lead of the game at 53-25 and capped a sterling 24-5 run that seemed to break the game open.

"Middle Tennessee showed tonight why they've won seven out of nine games," UALR coach Steve Shields said. "They showed incredible toughness during that stretch. They've shown an ability to make shots and make the extra pass. They are sound defensively. They are one of the best coached teams in our league and, in my opinion, college basketball."

UALR had a run left of its own and wouldn't go quietly. The Trojans went on a 19-2 run to cut the Middle Tennessee lead to 55-44 on Steven Moore's 3-pointer with 5:44 remaining but Yates nailed a short jumper to end the run and the Blue Raiders regained their composure down the stretch.

Middle Tennessee guards continued to prove themselves to be strong rebounders as Johnson and Kanaskie led the team with a game-high seven boards each, and Hudson also added five caroms to go along with four blocked shots. Hudson now has 51 career blocks and moved into sixth on the all-time list. Kanaskie also had one of his better games against a hard-nosed defense, dishing out four assists with no turnovers and collecting two steals. The Blue Raiders registered 14 assists on their 23 field goals.

Johnson connected on three 3-pointers in three attempts and Hudson played a career-best 35 minutes in the win. Gilchrest also was a major factor in the win. The freshman guard from Memphis enjoyed his most extensive playing time with 23 minutes and his play helped attack the UALR defense and provide offensive opportunities for the Blue Raiders - particularly in the second half run.

Postgame Quotes
Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis
Opening Comment
"That period in the second half was probably the best offensive rhythm we've gotten in all year. We shared the ball, defended well. We got lucky tonight that Little Rock struggled at the free throw line. The game could have been closer, they were 7 of 21. Then you got to give Steve Shield's team credit. I knew they'd make a run. I was hoping it wouldn't be that good of a run. They made like five straight 3s and scored on like 8 or 9 straight possessions and got that thing from 28 to 11 in about three or four minutes.

"I thought Broderick Gilchrest, it was really encouraging what he did tonight as a freshman off the

bench when Nigel got in foul trouble. And I thought Theryn Hudson was good, and Kevin, to play against that kind of pressure and have no turnovers, 12 points and seven rebounds, four assists, 40 minutes, was pretty spectacular for him."

On tonight's good defense

"We can play differently. Louisiana-Lafayette was just a grinding, possession by possession game. Arkansas State was a little more up and down, a little freer. Arkansas Little Rock guards so well and they rebound the ball really really well, I just think that, like I told our team, Nigel doesn't play for 18 minutes in the first half. He's been our best player. Desmond Yates was kind of off tonight, he didn't play as well. That credit goes to Little Rock. But we found other guys who stepped up and played well from Broderick to Kevin so we're starting to get better depth in our eight-man rotation and that's kind of the key."

On playing different styles of teams in the league

"I feel good about our team. What I feel good about is not just watching them on the floor. It's just being around them every day in practice and every day around them in film sessions and they're starting to be a lot more mature and understand. And winning helps that. So we have a lot of hard work ahead of us but I think those guys feel good about themselves and we've got to get this one behind us tonight and go right to Florida International Saturday."

On UALR's defensive pressure in the first half

"They give everybody fits defensively. They are physical and they press you and they get you out of rhythm. Broderick Gilchrest changed the game, he really did, because Demetrius Green and (Darren Avery) were kind of struggling against the press and we took Nigel out and Kevin's not a guy that just goes by people. Broderick Gilchrest, our freshman guard came in, and got inside the defense and kind of backed them off a little bit with dribble penetration. And then we got the ball to the post."

On the FIU game Saturday

" I told our team you can hang your hat on winning four games in nine days and three of them being on the road in conference play, and that's what it would be. That's hard to do in any league. The league's are all relative so that's what we're trying to do on Saturday."

Junior Guard Kevin Kanaskie

On playing the best offensive-game of the season at Arkansas State Monday and playing the best defensive game (as a team) vs. UALR Thursday.

"We're getting better, we still have some work to do obviously, but to know that we can still win when we're not shooting 60 percent like we had to at Arkansas State is positive."

On UALR's defensive pressure

"I think we just got used to it. They really sped us up the first half we were picking up our dribble, we hadn't really seen that. And in the second we kept our dribble and were more relaxed."

On UALR's run in the second half

"We just hung in there I guess. They did the same thing last year at their place when we were up 19 and held on to win by one. I mean they're so good. We wish we could offensive rebound like them and that's how they score. They had 18 tonight. So we know its not over till it's over but we just hung in there and just tried to work down the clock."

Junior Forward Theryn Hudson
On the run to start the second half
"We just did a good job of being unselfish and passing the ball around and getting open 3s."

On UALR guarding Desmond Yates well
"I think it affects me well because when other players focus on Desmond Yates it leaves me open sometimes for one on one coverage."

On winning streak
"We think we can win every game but the reason we're doing better is because our bench players are doing better. In the beginning of the season a lot of our bench didn't have confidence, but now its starting to get a lot of confidence."

UALR Coach Steve Shields
On the loss to Middle Tennessee
"Middle Tennessee showed tonight why they've won seven out of nine games. They showed incredible toughness during that stretch. They've shown an ability to make shots and make the extra pass. They are sound defensively. They are one of the best coached teams in our league and in my opinion college basketball."

On the UALR's offensive play
"That is something that we have worked an awful lot on. We are obviously not there at this point. To say we have struggled to make shots is an understatement. I thought we valued the basketball better tonight. Our goal was 14 or less. We had 10 at the half. I thought that was really an important part of our nine point deficit in the first half. We had out-rebounded them by eight or seven at the half. I thought that was a very important part of tonight's game. They were 2-8 when they are out-rebounded and they are 8-2 when they out-rebound their opponent. We did a good job on the glass. We decided to send four on the offensive glass instead of three because of our struggles to get shots to go down. We have to get more efficient offensively."

On how to rebound after two tough losses
"It's tough. I think we have to continue to stay together as a basketball team and continuously look at things we need to tweak. As long as we continue to make good shots, we have to believe. I thought we made an excellent run in the second half and cut the lead to 11. We came back down and took a quick shot. It wasn't what we needed in order to cut their lead to a single digit deficit. They come down and score an and-one dunk after we foul them and they get a three-point play out of it. Those plays are where we've got to be more together. We all have to look ourselves in the mirror."

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