

Blue Raiders notch 10th SBC win, secure first-round home game in tourney

Middle Tennessee first SBC team to win at Denver, 65-58

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DENVER - Middle

Tennessee's first trip to the Mile High City for a men's basketball in three years proved profitable as the Blue Raiders continued their sterling second-half run with a 65-58 win against Denver at the Magness Arena. With the win the Blue Raiders (13-13, 10-6) became the first Sun Belt team to win at Denver this season as the Pioneers dropped to 7-1 against league foes at home and 9-2 overall (with the only other loss to Colorado). The Blue Raiders also secured a first-round home game in the Sun Belt Conference championship and they notched a milestone by securing their 10th Sun Belt win - which is the most league wins for the team since joining the SBC in 2000-01. "This was



a nice win for our basketball team and a hard-earned one," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "It's not easy to come here and win as evidenced by the fact no other team in the Sun Belt has been able to do so and I'm very proud of our team for that. It was a team win and our team continues to improve with each game." Balanced scoring was the theme for Middle Tennessee as Demetrius Green tallied a game-high 17 points, Desmond Yates netted 16, Kevin Kanaskie netted 14, and Dino Hair established a career high with 11 points and a game-high six rebounds. The Blue Raiders shot 55 percent (21-of-38) for the game, including a sizzling 63 percent (12-of-19) in the second half. They knocked down 44 percent from beyond the arc. Bench play was also crucial and Hair and freshman guard Broderick Gilchrest came up large. In addition to Hair's 11 points, Gilchrest scored five, dished out four assists and swiped four steals in 29 minutes of action. Hair and Gilchrest were major factors in the road win - Middle Tennessee's 25th under league road win under Davis - because Theryn Hudson and Nigel Johnson were saddled with foul trouble throughout the game. While the Blue Raider bench has not been a major factor in recent games it was huge against the

Pioneers (11-15, 7-8) as it outscored the home team's reserves 16-2. The Blue Raiders also scored 21 points off turnovers and tallied 14 second-half points. "I thought we had several key contributions to this win but Dino and Broderick came up big for us tonight," Davis said. "I thought (Gilcrest) was a big key to the win, maybe the difference in the game. He was solid." So were the usual suspects - Kanaskie, Yates and Green. Kanaskie played all 40 minutes at 5,342 feet altitude and bucketed three of Middle Tennessee's four 3-pointers - all in the second half. Green was also outstanding, particularly in the second half when he scored 10 of his 17. In fact, he and Kanaskie teamed to turn the game in Middle Tennessee's favor for good at the outset of the second half. Denver led 23-21 at halftime and extended the lead to 25-21 at the start of the second half. It was 27-23 Denver when Kanaskie and Green took matters into their hands. Kanaskie nailed Middle Tennessee's first 3-pointer of the game with 18:19 remaining to cut the lead to 27-26 and after Denver increased the margin to 29-26, Green scored seven consecutive points to give the Blue Raiders a 33-31 lead. Kanaskie followed with a long trey to extend the lead to 36-31 and the Blue Raiders never looked back as they outscored the hosts 44-35 in the final 20 minutes. "At halftime coach Davis talked about driving inside when the man on us rotated and he told me to stay aggressive," Green said. "I tried to do that and it paid off. This was a big win for us. Our team is on the right track and 10-6 feels pretty good right now but we still have unfinished business." The Blue Raiders have very little turn-around time as they travel to Boca Raton, Fla., to face Florida Atlantic Saturday at 6 p.m.

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