Blue Raider comeback falls just short

Kanaskie scores 21 in setback

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BOCA RATON, Fla. - Middle Tennessee put forth a gallant second-half effort in a stirring comeback bid but the Blue Raiders dug themselves too large of a first-half deficit and suffered a 75-67 setback against Florida Atlantic here Saturday night. The Blue Raiders (13-14, 10-7) trailed by as many as 16 and were down 39-25 at the half but they cut the deficit to two, 69-67, with 38 seconds and had Demetrius Green at the line with a chance to complete a three-point play and cut it to one. "We just were not very good in the first half and that hurt us in the end," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "I am proud of my team and the way they battled and came back in the second half. That's our team, the one that was on the court in the second half but we just didn't play well enough to win in the first half." Kevin Kanaskie scored a season-high 21 points to lead the Blue Raiders, Desmond Yates netted 18 and Demetrius Green tallied 13. Theryn Hudson narrowly missed a double double with eight points and 10 rebounds. Forward Carlos Monroe was a beast for the Owls (13-16, 7-9) as he scored 21 points and yanked 17 of Florida International's 40 rebounds, of which nine were offensive. Middle Tennessee managed 31 rebounds but just four were offensive caroms and Hudson had three of those. "We work extremely hard on rebounding and I would find it hard to believe any team works on that area of the game harder than us, especially late in the season, and we can only get four offensive rebounds off 32 missed shots. That was disappointing," Davis said. "Florida Atlantic was just the more physical

team tonight. We battled hard but it wasn't enough." Middle Tennessee actually outshot Florida Atlantic 41.8 percent to 35.3 percent but a big difference in the game was at the free-throw line, where the Owls were 36-of-43 for an 83.7 percent showing. In fact, Florida Atlantic outscored Middle Tennessee by 17 at the free-throw line. The Blue Raiders were an impressive 19-of-22 at the charity stripe but they couldn't get there enough. It was difficult for either team to get into any form of offensive rhythm as there were 65 free throws attempted between the teams, as well as a whopping 48 fouls called - 28 on Middle Tennessee and 20 on the Owls. The Blue Raiders trailed 62-50 with 7:31 remaining but they outscored the hosts 10-0 over the next 4:11 to pull to within 62-60 on Yates' jumper with 3:20 remaining. Middle Tennessee's trapping defense created havoc for the Owls during the stretch as they were 0-of-8 from the field. In fact, the Owls only hit one field goal in the final 9:50 but they were able to get to the line just enough to hold on down the stretch. After the Owls got the lead back to six, 66-60, with 2:24 remaining Yates nailed a jumper to cut it to 66-62; however, Paul Graham hit two free throws get the lead back to six. Kanaskie knocked down a long 3-pointer to cut the deficit to 68-65 with 1:20 remaining. Graham followed with one of two charity tosses but Green came back with a driving layup and was fouled with 38 seconds remaining. He missed the free throw line but the Blue Raiders had made it a one-possession game, 69-67, with time remaining. The Owls, however, were 6-of-6 from the line in the final 38 seconds to seal the win. The Blue Raiders will conclude the regular season against Troy at Murphy Center Saturday.

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