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Men's basketball shows offensive flair during scrimmage

Johnson leads five in double figures with 19 points

Athletic Communications

Offensive prowess was one aspect of the Middle Tennessee men's basketball team revealed during the team's Blue-White scrimmage Wednesday as several Blue Raiders demonstrated an ability to score with consistency.

- **Photos:** [Preseason photo gallery](#)

Five Blue Raiders scored double figures and 12 of the 15 who played scored in the 36-minute scrimmage played under full game situations with three collegiate referees. [Nigel Johnson](#) continued to have a solid preseason and led the scoring with 19 points, [Demetrius Green](#) netted 17, followed by Desmond "Boogie" Yates with 15, [Montarrio Haddock](#) with 13 and [Kevin Kanaskie](#) with 11.

"We have some nice stretches of offense, we can move the play and we play unselfishly," Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis said. "We have more guys who can really score it. We can do some nice things offensively and we are playing better in transition."

Johnson has helped trigger the transition attack with his athleticism and decision making in the open court. His well rounded stat line in the scrimmage was indicative of his preseason. Johnson was 6-of-8 from the field, including 4-of-6 from 3-point range, pulled five rebounds, dished out four assists and collected three steals.

Backcourt mate Kanaskie's play also was exemplary. The senior guard supported his 11-point performance with five assists and three steals.

"Kevin has been our most consistent guy from day one, you know what you are going to get every day," Davis said. "He had a solid floor game. Nigel was solid. He played really well in the first 24 minutes. He shot it well, ran our team and was really fast. I also thought [Antwaun Boyd](#) showed some flashes and was really getting to the rim."

Green also demonstrated strong offensive skills inside and out. His 17 points keyed a strong run in the second 12-minute scrimmage that brought his team from behind.

Yates continues to work his way back to 100 percent playing shape after missing almost two weeks due to injury but still managed to produce a double double with 15 points and a scrimmage-best 11 rebounds. He started slow in the first 12-minute scrimmage but started to dominate the final two segments.

"I started slow but as the game went on I picked it up and started getting stops on defense, rebounding, and I got a couple of buckets," Yates said. "I'm trying to get myself back into playing shape. I want to be in the best shape ever and work my way back to where I can do the things I know I can do and be the player coach wants me to be."

UPON FURTHER REVIEW: Middle Tennessee's offense was productive during the Blue-White scrimmage but the defensive effort may have been somewhat of a contributing factor.

Make no mistake, the Blue Raiders pack offensive punch, but Davis would have liked to see the defense offer a bit more resistance.

"You are looking to get your practice into the game, trying to get your 4-on-4 defending into your defense, your get-back in transition defense and we did not do that like we need to," Davis said. "We need the grit and toughness to get stop after stop after stop. We show flashes but we have to continue to work on being able to sustain that over a period of time."

Players agreed with their coach's assessment of the first preseason scrimmage. They said the workout was productive in providing a barometer of where the team is two weeks before the season opener.

"The scrimmage was very helpful in showcasing the strengths and weakness of our team," Johnson said. "Our weakness right now is getting back (on defense). We have to continue working on that or teams will make you pay. The coaches were looking for us to convert our practices into game situations and I don't think we did that completely."

IT IS A TOUGH GAME: Kanaskie won't have to spring for a Halloween costume this year. He could easily pass for a



Nigel Johnson goes up for a dunk in the Blue-White scrimmage. (B. Lambert)

hockey player.

The hard-nosed Kanaskie was involved in a baseline collision that resulted in the loss of part of one of his front teeth. The tough workhorse placed a gauze in his mouth and never missed a minute of the scrimmage.

The mishap did cost him cameo appearances for the Murphy Center "Blue Tubes."

"Kevin was supposed to do some videos for the Blue Tube after the scrimmage but that got nixed when he lost half of his front tooth," Davis said.

HADDOCK IMPRESSES: Newcomer Haddock had a creditable first scrimmage with the Blue Raiders. The forward continues to make progress throughout the preseason. He totaled 13 points and his eight rebounds were second most.

"(Haddock) had a solid first scrimmage," Davis said. "He has worked hard and he continues to improve his conditioning."

QUIETLY PRODUCTIVE: [Darren Avery](#) does not dominate the headlines but his steady play continues to earn him playing time as his minutes have increased in each of his first two seasons as a Blue Raider.

Avery is regarded as one of the team's top defenders and his knack for doing the little things well make a big difference. He had seven rebounds and displayed his passing skills by tying for the team lead with five assists.

TAKING A HIT: Blue Raiders were among the league's best at drawing charges last season and the defensive mentality was prevalent during the scrimmage. Five Blue Raiders took charges as Kanaskie, Green, Yates, Dino Hair, and [Eric Allen](#) each drew one.

EXHIBITION ACTION: Middle Tennessee will play host to Cumberland in the first two of preseason exhibition games Saturday at 4 p.m.

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