

Big second half carries men's basketball to exhibition win

Yates produces double double with 25 points, 10 rebounds vs. North Alabama

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MURFREESBORO , Tenn. - Middle Tennessee used a big second half to pull away from North Alabama and capture a 75-57 win in the final exhibition game of the preseason at Murphy Center Thursday.

Leading the charge for the Blue Raiders was junior forward Desmond "Boogie" Yates, who responded to the challenge of being a better rebounder with a double double that featured 25 points and 10 caroms, game highs in each category. Yates was 9-of-15 from the field, including 7-of-8 at the free-throw line, and his 10-rebound performance included three offensive boards that resulted in second-chance opportunities.



"Boogie was good tonight,"

Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "He was very active and he rebounded very well. It was encouraging to see him get three offensive rebounds. He was also good on defense against (Thomas) Fraise. You are almost more surprised when he misses a shot. He's so good around the rim you just expect them all to go in and most of them did tonight."

Yates was not the only Blue Raider to produce favorable results in the final tune-up before the Nov. 14 season opener against Trevecca. Kevin Kanaskie turned in 13 points, dished out nine assists, had just two turnovers and collected two steals in a stellar all-around game that also included four rebounds. Kanaskie found the bottom of the net for all three of the Blue Raiders' 3-point field goals made.

Nigel Johnson, Montarrio Haddock, and Antwaun Boyd each scored eight points, and junior transfer Josh Jones had 11 quality minutes that produced six points on 3-of-3 shooting and a more physical defensive approach. Boyd provided a spark off the bench and firmly entrenched himself in the Blue Raider rotation with a noteworthy all-around performance. Boyd had eight points, three rebounds, three assists, one block and one steal.

North Alabama hung around throughout the first half and trailed 34-28 at the half. Middle Tennessee never trailed and essentially controlled the first half although the Lions did tie the game 26-26 with 5:57 remaining.

The Blue Raiders opened the second half with a 13-2 run in the first 2:57 to race out to a 47-30 lead. Boyd's jumper capped the run that was ignited by consecutive 3-pointers from Kanaskie to spark the uprising. Middle Tennessee maintained its double-digit lead for the majority of the second half except for three occasions when the visiting Lions scratched to within nine.

Middle Tennessee shot 54 percent (14-26) during the second half and 45 percent for the game. The Blue Raiders were improved defensively, limiting North Alabama to 57 points and 39 percent shooting from the field. Middle Tennessee also forced 22 turnovers. The negative was being outrebounded by one, 38-37, against North Alabama. Yates and Kanaskie combined for 14 of the team's 37 rebounds. Middle Tennessee will open the 2008-09 season against Trevecca at Murphy Center Nov. 14 at 7 p.m.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes

Head Coach Kermit Davis

On tonight's game vs. North Alabama:

"I thought a positive from the game was we had held North Alabama to 39 percent (shooting) which was a goal. Our assists to turnovers is probably the most positive thing from these two (exhibition) games. We just didn't play with a lot of confidence offensively. The only guy that made a 3-pointer was Kevin. We've got a long way to go."

On Nigel Johnson injury late in second half:

"It was a cramp. He has to play too many minutes in exhibition (games). I thought our depth was going to be a strong suit this season but as soon as we go to the bench the lead goes down in both halves. We were looking to go up 20 and go to the bench and all of a sudden it is 11 again. I thought Josh Jones was positive tonight. I think he guarded well. He's played better in practice and he's passed Dino Hair. At least he allows us to be more physical so that was positive for the new guys."

On starting rotation:

"Well if everyone was healthy I'd know exactly who we'd start. But right now we'll have Desmond Yates, Nigel Johnson, and Kevin Kanaskie, but the other two could change. Montario Haddock may be one of them, Josh Jones, Daren Avery, so that could change right now. "

Junior forward Desmond Yates

On run to start second half:

"We wanted to go out and execute. Our defensive field goal shooting percentage got a lot better from last Saturday (against Cumberland). We just wanted to come out and put everything from practice into the game. It's really important for us to do that right now."

On coach's challenge to rebound better:

"Tonight I was focusing on rebounds and defense. It's been really stressful with Theryn (Hudson) out, so for me right now I have to rebound well and play good defense on the other team's big man."

On 3-point shooting:

"It will improve because we have great shooters on our team. We took good shots tonight, we just missed them. But as long as we keep shooting they'll start falling."

On getting out rebounded:

"It's bad. We hoped to outrebound them by 10 or so but unfortunately it didn't happen. It's really important for all of us to rebound. It's disappointing but its something we'll have to work on."

Antwaun Boyd

On tonight's play:

"I need to stay aggressive and play good defense. I think I helped myself a lot tonight but I have to keep doing it in practice each day."

Importance of all-around game:

"It's really important, especially rebounding with our big man out. The guards have to rebound and make plays."

On starting the second half:

"Coach wanted me to stay aggressive on defense, especially guarding Kenny Johnson."

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