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Blue Raiders complete SEC gauntlet with 65-57 setback at Vanderbilt

Green leads team with 15 points, seven rebounds; Johnson injured

Athletic Communications



Demetrius Green drives for two of his team-high 15 points against Vanderbilt. (B. Lambert) 

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee put forth another valiant effort in its gauntlet of two SEC teams in a three-day span but Vanderbilt was able to use its size to outmuscle the Blue Raiders for a 65-57 win in front of 12,502 at Memorial Gym Monday.

The Blue Raiders were coming off a 76-66 setback against No. 13 Tennessee last Friday and facing back-to-back SEC foes for the first time since 1992 when they played Vanderbilt. Senior guard **Demetrius Green** and **Nigel Johnson** keyed Middle Tennessee's spirited attack with a combined 27 points and 12 rebounds.

Green led Middle Tennessee (2-2) in scoring for the second straight game with 15 points and he also collected a team-best seven rebounds. Johnson was electrifying once again with 12 points, five rebounds, four assists, one blocked shot and a steal.

Middle Tennessee may have lost more than the game. The Blue Raiders already are limited as senior center **Theryn Hudson** continues to battle a foot injury and did not dress for Monday's game at Vanderbilt and the injury report worsened when Johnson went down with a knee injury late in the second half. Johnson will have an MRI Tuesday to determine the extent of the injury.

"My main concern is **Nigel Johnson** and his health," Davis said. "I'm proud of our team. We didn't have a good first half offensively but we played well enough defensively to stay in the game. We played more like ourselves in the second half, really fought back into the game, and gave ourselves a chance.

"We would have liked to come out of this stretch with two wins and our team expected to do that. That's what I like about our team; those guys are disappointed in that locker room. I do know we are better for having played Tennessee and Vanderbilt. We had our chances against a very good Tennessee team that has a chance to do some great things this year and we were competitive against a good SEC team on the road so I feel good about our team."

Vanderbilt center A.J. Ogilvy, a preseason first-team All-SEC selection, collected a double double with 19 points and 11 rebounds. He also blocked three shots and created problems in the paint for the smaller Blue Raider lineup. Vanderbilt ripped down 42 rebounds to Middle Tennessee's 30.

Desmond Yates finished with eight points for Middle Tennessee and **Calvin O'Neil** came off the bench to contribute eight as the Blue Raider bench outscored the Commodores' 13-7.

Vanderbilt used a late first-half run to carry a 31-17 lead into the half; however, the Blue Raiders came out strong in the second half and quickly cut the lead to six, 33-27, on

Johnson's 3-pointer with 16:48 remaining. From there, Vanderbilt was never able to pull away and Middle Tennessee made it a fight to the finish.

Middle Tennessee prevented any sustained Vanderbilt (2-1) runs with strong defense throughout the second half but the Blue Raiders could never put together a strong enough run to get over the hump as the Commodores' defense was equally stifling.

The key stretch that plagued Middle Tennessee actually occurred during a 7:28 span late in the first half. Vanderbilt was clinging to a 13-11 lead after Yates' pull-up jumper in the lane was true with 9:11 remaining in the first half. From there; however, Middle Tennessee went scoreless for 7:28 and Vanderbilt used a 10-0 run to take a 23-11 lead with 2:39 remaining before intermission.

That stretch proved pivotal as Middle Tennessee outscored Vanderbilt 40-34 in the second. The Blue Raiders return to action when they play host to Houston, Dec. 2 at 7 p.m.

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