

Strong comeback falls short for Blue Raiders

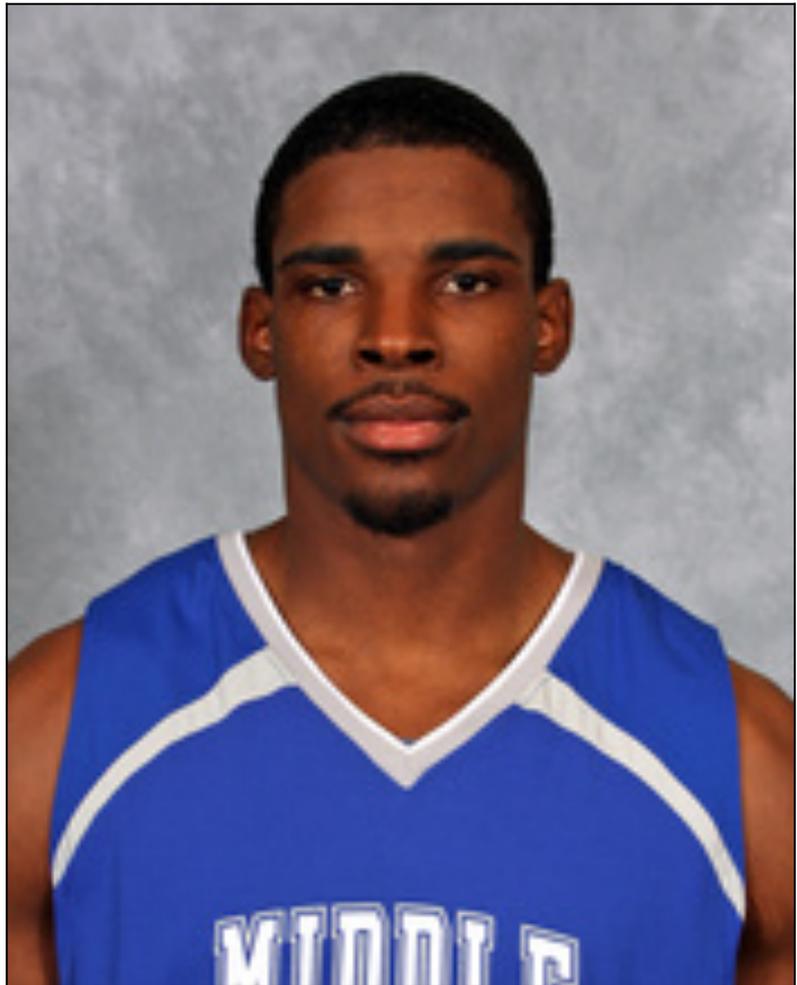
Yates, Green combine for 36 points in 70-67 setback to Houston

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Kevin Kanaskie's 3-pointer from the top of the key caromed off the rim with no time remaining as Middle Tennessee suffered a gut-wrenching 70-67 setback to Houston at Murphy Center Tuesday.

The Blue Raiders had rallied from a nine-point deficit, 65-56, with 5:21 remaining to give them a chance to force overtime at the final buzzer; however, the depleted squad ran out of time before it could complete the comeback. Middle Tennessee was playing without seniors Theryn Hudson (foot) and Nigel Johnson (knee) and transfer Eric Allen (knee) also was unavailable due to injury.



Desmond Yates and Demetrius Green carried Middle Tennessee in their absence, combining for 36 points and 16 rebounds, including four offensive boards. Yates narrowly missed a double double with 19 points and nine rebounds, and Green finished with 17 points and seven rebounds. Green has scored 15 or more in each of his three starts. Kanaskie finished with nine for Middle Tennessee (2-3).

Houston (5-1) used the talents of guards Kelvin Lewis and Aubrey Coleman to do in the Blue Raiders. Coleman finished with a game-high 24 points and seven rebounds, followed by Lewis with 23 points.

Despite a growing injury list, particularly to key components of the squad, Middle Tennessee still had an opportunity to secure victory. Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis generally played seven players a bulk of the minutes and two of those (Antwaun Boyd and Demario Williams) are

freshmen.

Trailing 33-31 at the half, Middle Tennessee came out strong in the second half and used a 7-0 run almost midway through the final stanza to pull ahead 50-44 on Montarrio Haddock's jumper at the 12:48 mark. The strong Blue Raider run was followed by an even stronger Houston run as the Cougars outscored Middle Tennessee 21-4 over the next six-plus minutes to go up 65-54 with 5:56 remaining.

"The critical part of the game, we were up by six and then for about a six-minute period they just got it to the rim," Davis said. "The game flip-flopped in about a three-minute span. I really commend our guys' effort; they played hard for the last five minutes or so to give us a chance. We have to give Houston credit, too, though. Their two guards played great tonight. We couldn't keep them out of the paint and they made shots. No matter who was out or didn't play we still have to win that game."

The Blue Raiders showed tremendous grit and determination in almost overcoming the 11-point deficit in the game's final five minutes. Williams' 3-pointer from the left wing cut the deficit to 67-63 with 2:10 and, following a strong defensive stand that ended with a miss of a long 3-pointer, Calvin O'Neil hauled in an offensive rebound, drew the foul, and hit one of two free throws to cut the lead to 67-64.

After Houston stretched the lead back to five, Green buried a long 3-pointer to pull Middle Tennessee to within 69-67 with 13 seconds remaining. Horace McGloster made the first of two free throws to extend the lead back to three, 70-67.

Middle Tennessee had an opportunity to get off a good look at a potential game-tying 3-pointer; however, Kanaskie bobbled the ball at the top of the key and had to force an off-balance jumper.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes

Head Coach Kermit Davis

On the Houston game:

"The critical part of the game, we were up by six and then for about a six-minute period they just got it to the rim. The game flip flopped in about a three-minute span. I really commend our guys' effort; they played hard for the last five minutes or so to give us a chance. We have to give Houston credit though too. Their two guards played great tonight. We couldn't keep them out of the paint and they made shots. No matter who was out or didn't play we still have to win that game."

On how the team played early without Nigel Johnson:

"(Kevin) Kanaskie has to play better; we really haven't got much out of him early. He's a preseason all-league player and we have to have him play like that. We have to do a better job screening for him and getting him open looks but we were searching for something. Those guys played hard but we missed Nigel."

On the last play:

"We were looking to set a pick for Kevin but he just fumbled the ball. They made a play at the end. We were out of timeouts and we were trying not to foul Kelvin Lewis. He panicked and almost threw the ball away but Montarrio (Haddock) didn't run through the passing lane and then they make one (free throw)."

Junior forward Desmond Yates

On playing without Nigel Johnson and Theryn Hudson:

"It's unfortunate that those guys are out but we have to have other people step up. We know when we get Theryn and Nigel back we'll be more like a complete team, but while they're out we have to have other guys step up."

On tonight's rebounding:

"We wanted to attack the rebounds on both ends. That's all we've done in practice for the last four or five days. We did a good job of attacking but we just couldn't pull out the win."

Senior guard Demetrius Green

On driving to the basket:

"(Houston) is really long, so we just couldn't put it in the basket when we should have."

On Houston's second half run:

"We lost our composure and weren't playing as hard as we were earlier. A lot of teams make runs but we just have to keep playing until the end, which we didn't do tonight. We played well at the end but we had that lull and it cost us."

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