Blue Raiders fall 3-2 to host No. 17 Purdue

Mead leads team in third consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance

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WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Middle Tennessee fell 3-2 (18-25, 26-24, 18-25, 25-22, 8-15) to No. 17 Purdue in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. The Blue Raiders dropped the first set before winning sets two and four to force the fifth set. Middle Tennessee (27-8) has played four straight five-set matches and has a 5-5 record for the season in five-set matches. After this match, Purdue (25-8) has won 11 straight five set matches and is 11-1 on the season in five set matches. Junior Ashley Mead led the Blue Raiders throughout the night and ended the match with 20 kills. Middle Tennessee had 61 kills on night with a .204 attack percentage as sophomore Izabela Kozon and freshman Stacy Oladinni added double-digit kills as well. Kozon had 13 kills one match after recording a career high and Oladinni had a career high 14 kills with a .344 attack percentage. Purdue recorded 60 kills on the night with a .279 attack percentage with Kristen Arthurs leading the way with 15 kills for a .444 attack percentage. Service errors proved to be crucial in the match as the Blue Raiders had 14 service errors compared to Purdue who had four. Middle Tennessee has had 14 double-digit service error matches this season and the last time it had 14 in a match was against UT-Arlington on Sept. 13 in a 3-1 win. Junior Leslie Clark had a critical service error in the fifth set to give Purdue a seven-point lead 13-7 and the Boilermakers went on an 8-3 run to end the match. The Blue Raiders had nine team blocks led by senior Ashley Asberry who had six block assists with Clark adding five of her own. The Boilermakers had 15 blocks as a team led by Stephanie Lynch who had eight block assists on the night. Lynch also had 13 kills on the night with Danita Merlau adding 12 to help the Purdue offense. Purdue began controlling the first set early taking a 4-2 lead but a kill by Mead and a block by Clark and Yancey tied score at 4. The Boilermakers then scored six of the next seven points to take a five-point lead, 10-5. The two teams kept trading points with Purdue leading at the halfway point, 15-12. Middle Tennessee kept battling but the Boilermakers pulled ahead by five, 20-15. The Blue Raiders held off set point twice before Purdue took the win. To begin the second set the two schools traded points but the Blue Raiders came from behind by two-points to tie the set at 8 and pulled ahead 11-9 after an ace by Asberry. Trailing 15-12 the Blue Raiders scored six of the next eight points to take an 18-17 lead. Purdue tied the set four times and held off set point for the Blue Raiders twice before Middle Tennessee took the win to tie the match at 1. At the break, Middle Tennessee had 29 kills for a .303 attack percentage led by Oladinni and Kozon with seven kills each. Kozon had an attack percentage of .400 while

Oladinni was hitting .583. Clark led the defense posting three block assists while the team recorded four total blocks. Purdue also had four blocks at the break and had recorded 26 kills for a .263 attack percentage. Purdue jumped out to a quick 6-1 lead to begin the third set. The Boilermakers extended their lead to seven-points but the Blue Raiders would not give up. Behind the serve of Kozon, which included two aces, Middle Tennessee scored six straight points cutting the lead to one, 14-13. Purdue regained control and never looking back taking a 23-15 lead and allowing the Blue Raiders to score just two more points in the set. The Boilermakers maintained control of the match taking a 10-5 lead to begin the fourth set. Middle Tennessee kept battling and after a block by Asberry and Clark and a kill by Mead tied the set at 14. Purdue jumped out by three but Mead stepped up to the plate knocking down two kills and then a block by Oladinni and Yancey knotted the score again at 18. The two continued to trade points but the Blue Raiders took a late three point lead, 24-21. Purdue staved off one set point attempt by the Blue Raiders but a service error by Merlau handed MT the set. After the fourth set, Mead led the team with 16 kills followed by Kozon and Oladinni with 11 and 14 kills respectively. The Blue Raiders had 54 kills as a team for a .228 attack percentage as Purdue had a .291 hitting percentage with the same number of kills. Middle Tennessee had just nine blocks led by Asberry with six block assists while Purdue had 13 total blocks with Lynch posting eight. Purdue won the race to eight in the fifth set leading the Blue Raiders 8-5. Middle Tennessee could not score as the Boilermakers took a 12-5 lead after scoring six straight points. Middle Tennessee ends the 2008 season with a 27-8 record and appeared in its third straight NCAA Tournament.

Middle Tennessee State head coach Matt Peck:

Opening statement...

"It was a difficult match for us. Of our eight losses this season, five have been in five-game matches. Right at the end we shanked two passes and that was about the end of it. When we were passing well, we weren't having and trouble scoring. **On team's service errors...**

"That was huge. Last night we had three service errors. Tonight, we had fifteen and they weren't even aggressive errors. **Sophomore outside hitter Izabela Kozon:**

On size of Purdue's players...

"They were a taller team. It is harder to hit when the team is taller." **Junior libero Ashley Waugh:**

On having family in attendance...

"I have a really big family and they all traveled up here. It's only about an hour away for them. They are very supportive of me and my team." **Junior outside hitter Ashley Mead:**

On being undersized for an outside hitter...

"I think it's very funny because all my life I have been overlooked. That actually makes me play so much harder and so much better. I take a pretty fast approach and I think that's what helps a lot."

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