

December 11, 2008

Blue Raiders, Yates convincing in SBC opener vs. Troy

Preseason POY pours in 27 points, collects 13 rebounds in 81-53 win

Athletic Communications

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - It was the first conference game in what is a long league race but Middle Tennessee confirmed why coaches picked it to win the Sun Belt's East Division and star forward Desmond "Boogie" Yates demonstrated why he was named Preseason Player of the Year in a convincing 81-53 win against Troy in the SBC opener for both teams at Murphy Center Thursday.

Playing with its full compliment of players for the first time this season, Middle Tennessee used an impressive 16-0 run midway through the first half to take command of the game and never looked back as it improved to 4-3 overall, 1-0 in SBC action. On a night when several Blue Raiders put their best foot forward, Yates was a shining star.

The junior forward collected a double double as he poured in a season-high 27 points on 13-of-18 shooting, pulled a career-high 13 rebounds and moved into 28th on the all-time scoring list with 986 career points. It was Yates' 50th double figure scoring game and marked the 17th time he has scored 20 or more. Middle Tennessee is 13-4 in those games. Yates' 13 field goals also were a career high.

[Kevin Kanaskie](#) also was solid with 11 points, seven assists and just two turnovers. Kanaskie moved into 30th on the all-time scoring list with 946 points. [Montarrio Haddock](#) added 10 points, Demario Williams tied his career high with seven and [Nigel Johnson](#) added 11 points and a season-high eight rebounds as 10 of 12 Blue Raiders who played scored.

The game marked the return of senior center [Theryn Hudson](#) and Johnson, the talented guard who missed the previous two games with a knee injury. Hudson had missed five of the team's first six games with a foot injury.

"I thought our team was as close to a complete team as we've been all year," said Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis, who notched his 175th career win at the Division I level. "It was good to have [Theryn Hudson](#) back in there and I think he keyed our big run in the first half. He didn't really score a lot but just his presence in there was big. Our depth was good. [Demetrius Green](#), who has been our best player for the last few weeks, didn't make a basket but we still won. That's where our depth really pays off."

The Blue Raiders dominated the boards, 46-32, marking the third straight game they have had 45 or more caroms. Middle Tennessee also clamped down defensively against the Trojans (3-6, 0-1), who came into the game as the SBC's highest-scoring team at 78.1 points per game; however, they were held 25 points below that mark and shot just 33 percent.

"We met some of our defensive goals tonight and played well overall," Yates said. "We lost some of our defensive intensity late there in the second half and that can't happen but, overall, it was a strong all-around performance and it was a great way to start the conference race."

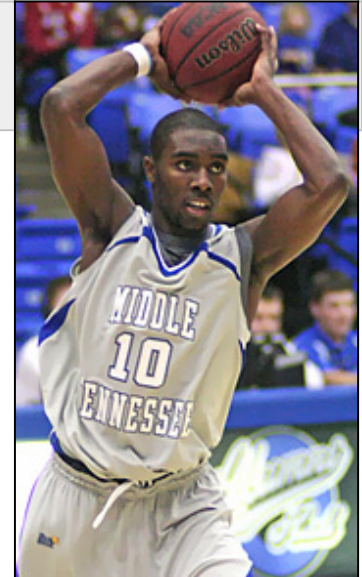
It's hard to argue the return of Hudson and Johnson made a significance impact in the team. Middle Tennessee trailed 15-14 with 11:03 remaining in the first half when Johnson, who had started but subbed out, re-entered the game. Seconds later Hudson entered the game.

Almost seven minutes later Middle Tennessee was in control of the game.

The two helped trigger a 16-0 run over the next 6:15 that saw Middle Tennessee turn a 15-14 deficit into a 31-15 advantage with 6:18 remaining. Yates scored 11 of his 27 points during the 16-0 run to help the Blue Raiders seize advantage but it was suffocating defense and unrelenting work on the boards that turned the tide in Middle Tennessee's favor and helped it build a 41-24 halftime advantage.

From there Middle Tennessee continued to build on the lead in the second half and never allowed Troy to get closer 24 in the final 15 minutes.

[Eric Allen](#) also had a solid all-around game with four points and three assists with no turnovers. Dino Hair contributed six points on



Freshman guard Demario Williams tied his career high with seven points vs. Troy. (B. Lambert)

3-of-3 shooting. Hudson finished with four points, six rebounds, and two assists in 13 minutes of action.

The Blue Raiders improved to 6-1 in SBC home openers under Davis and will return to action seeking their third straight win when they play host to UT-Martin Monday at 7 p.m.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Press Conference

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis

On tonight's game:

"I thought our team was as close to a complete team as we've been all year. It was good to have [Theryn Hudson](#) back in there and I think he keyed our big run in the first half. He didn't really score a lot but just his presence in there was big. Our depth was good tonight. [Demetrius Green](#), who has been our best player for the last few weeks, didn't make a basket but we still won. That's where our depth really pays off."

On big run with [Nigel Johnson](#) and [Theryn Hudson](#) on floor:

"It's big to have them in there. You would love to have your complete team for the first six, but that's passed us now and we just have to get this team better."

On people playing out of position with injuries:

"When Nigel went out against Houston we missed his leadership and quickness up the floor. Kevin had to guard the ball a lot and we need Nigel on the ball because of his pressure. So we asked a lot of some of those guys who hadn't played a lot. But I think our team feels more comfortable when they're in there."

On [Desmond Yates](#)' 13 rebounds:

"He jumped really well tonight. He's been playing that way in practice too. He's been scoring a lot better and rebounding better in practice so it was good to see it in a game. His last two games he's been very efficient."

Junior forward [Desmond Yates](#)

On having [Nigel Johnson](#) and [Theryn Hudson](#) back in the game:

"I don't think anyone understands how natural it is to have both guys in there. Monday was the first day that we all practiced together and it felt so good again to have them out there again."

On rhythm with Nigel and Theryn in the game:

"It just feels like natural. Everyone knows where they're going and what they're doing. It's just a rhythm we have together."

On playing more a natural position when [Theryn Hudson](#) in the game:

"It is for me because I don't have to guard the big guys anymore. I can slide back to my normal position. (Hudson) takes up a lot of space. I can roam around and get easier shots because you're not going to leave him open."

Senior guard [Nigel Johnson](#)

On getting back in the lineup:

"It was good to get back in the lineup. My knee is still a little sore, I can't really jump right now, but everything else is good. I just have to come out every now and then to give it rest but it'll get better."

Troy Head Coach Don Maestri

On the play of Middle Tennessee

"They have a great one in (Desmond) Yates. He really shot that ball well tonight. He's a great basketball player. You're starting off (conference play) at their place with some of the best conference players in the league. You have to play at a high level to be competitive. I thought they did a good job of being well balanced. Of course, Yates had the great game. I thought they did a very good job on us defensively."

On Middle Tennessee's big first half run

"When you stop scoring, you stop doing other things. You stop playing defense as well as you have been playing. You lose some intensity. It was that little dry spell. There was seven minutes where we never hit a bucket. Some of it was a credit to Middle Tennessee's defense. (Richard) Delk missed three shots right under the goal. We had an opportunity at a wide open 3-pointer. Some of it was our fault and I thought Middle Tennessee was very good defensively tonight."

On mixing up the lineup

"The shooting we were supposed to get from Brandon Hazard was a 30 percent night. Obviously, when he doesn't shoot the ball well, he doesn't help us in the rebound area or defensively. When you start him, he has to have a good night shooting. And he hasn't been shooting the ball well lately. I am hoping he breaks out of this slump because we have to have his scoring offense. When you put Kenny (Ware) in there for Brandon, you pick up on the defensive end and you also pick up in rebounding. That's a position change that we've made to try to help us. Especially, tonight we felt we had to shoot the ball extremely well to have a chance to play against a team that I think is well balanced."

On making progress

"This is not like football. We opened up with Middle in football and won. If we would have lost, we would have had a tougher time making a bowl. In basketball, it's the opposite. You have to be better at the end of the season. You can mess up in the beginning of the season, but you better be playing good basketball at the end. Ours is about progress. Can we keep making progress? Can we keep learning from these experiences that we are having here? We played another outstanding basketball team tonight. Middle Tennessee was in the game with Tennessee here. This is a very good basketball team. They were picked to win the league with five starters back, so that tells you something. We have to improve. That's my goal. I can't get down right now. Right now, we are on our multiplication tables and by the end of the year hopefully we are doing calculus. We just got to do a lot of little drills, just like you do in multiplication in order to get that down. Once we get that part of the game down, then we can make progress in other parts that we need to advance in. Hopefully, this system will come together down the road and we are a solid basketball team."

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