Blue Raiders open Basketball Travelers Tip-Off Tourney with win vs. UC-Irvine

Yates, Green, Haddock key 65-52 victory

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SPRINGFIELD, Mo. - Middle Tennessee got a much needed win and opened the Basketball Travelers Tip-Off Tournament with a 65-52 win against UC-Irvine at JQH Arena in Springfield, Mo., Saturday. Desmond "Boogie" Yates continued to climb the Blue Raider scoring list with a game-high 22 points on 11-of-15 shooting and pulled a team-high seven rebounds to lead Middle Tennessee, which also received 15 points from Demetrius Green and 13 points and five rebounds from Montarrio Haddock off the bench. "I thought our team played hard all night," Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis said. "I thought we made big plays when we had to make big plays, we executed down the stretch and held them to a really low percentage in the second half. It was a win we needed real bad." And it was a win the Blue Raiders (5-5) would not be denied, thanks to persistent defense and offensive execution down the stretch when the game was still on the line. UC-Irvine had pulled to within 44-43 with 9:51 remaining but the Blue Raiders stiffened on defense and held the Anteaters without a field goal over the next 6:22 as they started to pull away for good. "Our team defense was much better tonight and that is something we have really focused on in the last two practices," Yates said. "Our team is built on defense and rebounding and we have not been as strong in those two areas lately but we started to get some of that back into the game tonight and the result was a win." While the defense stepped up the offense also made a splash during the decisive run with Yates and Haddock keying the charge. Middle Tennessee used a 8-0 run to build a cushion during the late stages of the game and the Blue Raiders outscored UC-Irvine, 21-9, over the final 9:11 to stake claim to victory. Yates and Haddock combined for 13 of 14 points to start the run and Green's consecutive 3-pointers within a 47-second span provided the dagger as he second trey gave Middle Tennessee a 58-48 lead with 2:01 remaining. Middle Tennessee knocked down five-of-six free throws in the final minute to solidify the win. "Those were big shots," Green said of his consecutive 3-pointers adding, "but it was our defense tonight. We really stepped up on the defensive end and that was big. I had a couple good looks there and fortunately I was able to knock them down to help the team. This is a win we needed to get things back on the right track. Now we have to build on it." The Blue Raiders held UC-Irvine to 40 percent shooting for the game, including just 32 percent in the crucial second half when the Anteaters connected on just eight-of-25 field goals. The Blue Raiders shot 47 percent and were able

to create effective offensive in the second half when they were 13-of-27 for 48 percent. Middle Tennessee improved to 90-12 when outshooting the opposition under Davis. Free-throw shooting also was a key as Middle Tennessee connected on 14-of-16 attempts for a blistering 87.5 percent. Haddock continued to give Middle Tennessee quality minutes. His 13 points came on 4-of-5 shooting and he added five rebounds in 21 minutes of action. Calvin O'Neil added six points and Kevin Kanaskie finished with five. Yates moved into 25th on the all-time scoring list with his 22-point effort, passing Leroy Coleman. Yates enters Saturday's game with 1,042 career points, needing one to move into 24th and 14 to reach 23rd. His 22 points marked the 19th time he has scored 20 or more in his career, including the fifth time this season. The Blue Raiders are 14-5 when Yates scores 20 or more. Guard Antwaun Boyd, who had earned a starting job, suffered a dislocated shoulder during Friday's practice and is out for the tournament. His injury will be evaluated when the team returns home to determine when, and if, he will be able to return this season. Middle Tennessee will face Norfolk State in its second game of the three-game round robin tournament Saturday at 5:35 p.m. Live video streaming of the game is being provided by Missouri State and can be accessed for free either on GoBlueRaiders.com or MissouriStateBears.com.

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