

Four players reach double figures as Blue Raiders win fifth straight, 82-67, at South Alabama

Men's basketball off to best conference start in 20 years

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MOBILE, Ala. - Middle Tennessee made quite a statement on its recent five-game road trip but the Blue Raiders came up with their greatest declaration at the end of the difficult grind with an impressive 82-67 win at South Alabama Saturday. Balanced scoring with skillful offensive execution, tightfisted team defense and rebounding keyed the win as the Blue Raiders (9-5, 3-0) rolled to their fifth straight win but more importantly remained unbeaten in the Sun Belt Conference with a 3-0 mark. It marks the first time a Middle Tennessee team has started 3-0 in conference play since 1988-89 when it was a member of the Ohio Valley Conference. Senior guard Demetrius Green led four Blue Raiders in double figures with 18 points, Desmond "Boogie" Yates poured in 17 points with five rebounds, Kevin Kanaskie had a stellar all-around game with 16 points, five assists, no turnovers and tied his career

high with four steals, and Montarrio Haddock scored 13 points and yanked down a game-high seven rebounds to key the win. Nigel Johnson and Eric Allen just missed double figures with eight points each as Middle Tennessee enjoyed its greatest balance of the season. "This was really good basketball tonight," said Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis, who moved into a tie for ninth



on the SBC all-time coaching wins list with 54 regular-season league wins. "I've said it during this streak but I'm really proud of our basketball team. These guys have played at a high level and once again they did it tonight against a very good team at a tough place to play. "The offense was very good and I liked the way we guarded and rebounded. We are playing with a lot of confidence right now and that is always a good thing." Middle Tennessee shot 49 percent for the game but the Blue Raiders scorched the nets to the tune of 68 percent (15-of-22) shooting in the second half. They scored on 14 of their first 18 possessions to start the second half and turned a tight 36-32 halftime advantage into a run-away win. The Blue Raiders outscored South Alabama (9-6, 2-2) 30-15 in the first 9:52 of the second half to extend their lead 66-47 on Allen's running jumper with 10:18 remaining. From there the game was never in doubt as Middle Tennessee maintained a double-digit lead the remainder of the way. The run was keyed by one of the best offensive stretches of the season as Middle Tennessee players connected on 12 of their first 13 field goal attempts and hit all four free throw opportunities. Six different Blue Raiders hit field goals during the game-changing stretch. "We have that kind of team where anyone is capable of scoring double figures on a given night and we are starting to see that balance more frequently," Yates said. "We have a lot of different players scoring and contributing and that's how you put streaks together, plus our guards are really good and they do a good job of not only distributing the ball but also scoring." Defense and rebounding also are keys. While the Blue Raiders were connecting at a sizzling pace their defense made shots hard to come by for the Jaguars. South Alabama shot 35 percent (9-of-26) in the first half but stayed in the game by hitting 11-of-13 free-throw attempts. Despite playing with a smaller, four-guard lineup, Middle Tennessee won the rebounding battle 32-27 with Haddock and Calvin O'Neil leading the way with seven caroms each. Middle Tennessee's reserves reflected the depth that is becoming a team strength with 23 points off the bench. The Blue Raiders also scored 13 points off nine South Alabama turnovers. The Blue Raiders return to action when they play host to Florida Atlantic Thursday at 7 p.m. **NOTES:** Middle Tennessee's five-game win streak is its longest since a six-game win streak in 1997-98 ... The Blue Raiders' 3-0 start is its best conference start since 1988-89 ... Kevin Kanaskie moved past Freddie Martinez for fourth on the all-time 3-point field goals list with two vs. South Alabama. He now has 173 and needs seven more to tie Chris Rainey (180) for third ... Kanaskie moved into 26th on the career scoring list with 16 against South Alabama. He now has 1,034 points ... Desmond "Boogie" Yates is 19th on the all-time scoring list with 1,124 points ... Kanaskie tied his career high of four steals vs. South Alabama to move past Roni Bailey (112) for seventh on the all-time list with 115 ... The Blue Raiders improved to 6-0 this season and 35-1 all-time when scoring 80 or more points under Head Coach Kermit Davis ... Middle Tennessee improved to 8-0 this season when leading at the half and own the same record when leading with five minutes remaining ... Kermit Davis moved into a tie for ninth on the Sun Belt's all-time coaching wins list with 54 victories. The total only includes regular-season wins ... The Blue Raiders notched their 28th SBC road win under Davis. South Alabama is the only team with more league road wins during the same stretch with 29 ... Middle Tennessee won its 64th game vs. Sun Belt opponents under Davis, which is the fourth-most of any league member during the last six-plus seasons ... Demetrius Green led the Blue Raiders in scoring for the 11th time in his career. Green has scored double figures 21 of the last 22 games ... Montarrio Haddock has led Middle Tennessee in rebounding five times this season, including Saturday at South Alabama.