Comeback effort falls short as WKU turns back Blue Raiders in final seconds

MT maintains share of top spot in SBC East

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Steffphon Pettigrew's offensive rebound and subsequent putback with four seconds remaining lifted WKU to a 63-61 win against Middle Tennessee in a showdown of SBC East rivals in front of 5,142 at Diddle Arena Thursday night. Middle Tennessee, which had tied the game 61-61 on Calvin O'Neil's driving, pull-up jumper with 40 seconds remaining, played airtight defense on WKU's final series and forced the shot it wanted - a 22-footer by A.J. Slaughter with eight seconds remaining; however, a missed blockout enabled Pettigrew to come free, grab the rebound and score the two-footer that sent the Hilltoppers to victory. The final sequence summed up the game for the Blue Raiders (11-6, 5-1), particularly the decisive final five minutes as the Hilltoppers scored all nine of their points following missed shots that resulted in WKU offensive rebounds. WKU scored 13 second-chance points in the second half alone and won the rebounding battle 35-28, including 11 offensive caroms. Nine of the 11 offensive rebounds came in the second half with five occurring in the final five minutes. "It's disappointing because we had a great chance to get this win and did not play to our potential," Blue Raider junior forward Desmond "Boogie" Yates said. "We gave up too many offensive rebounds and they resulted in points. This is

the toughest loss I have ever had but we have to learn from it, put it behind us and get ready for UALR Saturday." Yates led four Blue Raiders in double figures with 14 points, Kevin Kanaskie and Nigel Johnson each scored 11 and Demetrius Green tallied 10. Green also had six rebounds, three assists, no turnovers and two steals. Montarrio Haddock battled foul trouble and scored nine points in 13 minutes. Slaughter led WKU with 16 points. Jeremy Evans and Sergio Kerusch combined for 20 of WKU's 35 rebounds with 10 each. The loss ended Middle Tennessee's seven-game win streak and it also was the Blue Raiders' first Sun Belt setback; however, Middle Tennessee remains tied for the East Division lead with WKU, which remained unbeaten at Diddle Arena this season. The Blue Raiders trailed 32-24 at the half and Slaughter hit a trey to start the second half and extend WKU's lead to 35-24, its largest of the game; however, Middle Tennessee answered with a 14-2 run to take a 38-37 lead on Kanaskie's three-point play with 13:27 remaining to set up another classic finish in the longstanding rivalry. Leading 43-41 following Yates' jumper with 11:50 remaining, Middle Tennessee appeared to catch a big break when the Blue Raiders forced a turnover and got the outlet pass ahead to Green, who was fouled hard by Matt Maresca. The officials called an intentional foul that was followed by a technical on the WKU bench. Green hit his two free throws and Kanaskie hit the two technical free throws to give the Blue Raiders a 47-41 lead with 11:28 remaining. WKU would not wilt, though, and the Hilltoppers (11-6, 5-1) came back with an 11-0 run to take a 52-47 lead with 7:58 remaining. The Blue Raiders scratched back and eventually tied the game on O'Neil's basket with 40 seconds remaining but, despite the strong defensive effort, couldn't come away with the key rebound that at worst would have forced overtime. Johnson was able to get a long pass to Green but his desperation 3-pointer with two seconds remaining was well off the mark. Middle Tennessee overcame a slow start with 52 percent shooting (14-of-27) in the second half and ended up shooting 43.6 percent for the game. Even though the Blue Raiders were able to get crucial defensive stops and limit to WKU to 11 second-half field goals, they were not able to get critical rebounds with the game in the balance. Middle Tennessee will face SBC West Division leader UALR in Little Rock, Ark., Saturday. **NOTES:** Desmond "Boogie" Yates moved into 15th on the all-time scoring list at Middle Tennessee with 14 at WKU. He now has 1,166 points. He moved past Harry Gupton (1,154), Kim Cooksey (1,16) and Warren Kidd (1,165) Thursday ... Kevin Kanaskie moved past Lee Nosse (1,056) and into 24th on the all-time scoring list with 11 points at WKU. He now has 1,064 points ... Kanaskie reached 450 career assists with two vs. WKU. He needs two to tie for second on the all-time list and 13 to reach Gerald Harris' mark of 463 ... The loss ended Middle Tennessee's seven-game win streak which is the longest since the 1990-91 season and tied for seventh-longest in program history.

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