

# Blue Raiders Can't Muster Offense in 54-44 Setback

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**LAFAYETTE, La.** - Middle Tennessee's defense was more than good enough against defending Sun Belt champion Louisiana-Lafayette, but the worst offensive effort of the season prevented a key road win as the Blue Raiders suffered a 54-44 setback in front of 6,133 at the Cajundome Saturday night. The Blue Raiders (13-8, 3-4) held the Ragin' Cajuns to one of their lowest offensive outputs of the season, but Middle Tennessee couldn't muster enough offense to secure a victory at a place where very few visiting teams taste success. After falling behind 20-5 less than 12

minutes into the game and trailing 26-14 at the half, Middle Tennessee clamped down defensively and mounted a furious comeback that saw the Blue Raiders own possession of the ball down two, 44-42 with 2:37 remaining. Mike Dean, who was playing for the first time since missing consecutive games with a toe injury, turned the ball over with 2:15 remaining and Louisiana-Lafayette (12-7, 6-1) went on a 10-2 run to close the game and escape with the win. "We played hard and competed and our defensive effort was good enough, but we couldn't score," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "We just weren't very good offensively tonight but we still had a chance late in the game because of our defense and we didn't take advantage of it. The first five minutes of the game it just seemed like we were in awe of them or something." Steve Thomas was the lone source of Middle Tennessee's offense, collecting his second consecutive double double with a career-high 19 points and 10 rebounds. Michael Cuffee added 10 points, but no other Blue Raider tallied double figures. Thomas was 7-of-14 from the field but the rest of the team was a combined 8-of-41 (20 percent). The Blue Raiders shot a season-low 27 percent (15-of-55). "We just couldn't get anything going consistently," Thomas said. "It's frustrating because we know we are a better team. The effort was there and the defense was more than good enough to win, but we couldn't do anything offensively. You have to give credit to Louisiana-Lafayette, though, because they played hard and guarded, too. They just did a little more than we did on the offensive end." The Ragin' Cajuns, who were led by Brian Hamilton's 16 points and 13 rebounds, shot just 32 percent (17-of-53) for the game which is

the second-lowest field goal percentage for Louisiana-Lafayette this season Middle Tennessee held the Cajuns to 16 points below their 70-point per game average and the 54 points were the third fewest for them this season. The Blue Raiders allowed just five field goals in the second half, and the Cajuns had their streak of 95 consecutive games with a 3-pointer snapped after going 0-of-16 beyond the arc. **NOTES:** Middle Tennessee held the Cajuns to 0-16 from 3-point range, marking the first time in 96 games they failed to connect for a trey ... The 44 points for Middle Tennessee marked the fewest it has scored since in a game since a 37-36 win against Morehead State on Feb. 6, 1978, a span of 775 games. Middle Tennessee actually is on record as scoring no points in a 2-0 forfeit to Tennessee State, Jan. 15, 1990, but the 44 points are the fewest in a 40-minute game since the 37 points against Morehead State ... Middle Tennessee senior Steve Thomas was 7-of-14 from the field against Louisiana-Lafayette, but the rest of the team was a combined 8-of-41 ... Thomas' 19 points were a career high and he hauled in 10 points for his second consecutive double double and third of the season ... Senior guard Mike Dean scored just two points on 1-of-10 shooting, the lowest offensive output of his Blue Raider career. Dean had missed the team's two previous games against New Mexico State and New Orleans due to a toe injury.

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