Haddock's double double keys charge as Blue Raiders secure 60-57 win

Team wins for eighth time in last 10 outings

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Montarrio Haddock's first career double double ignited Middle Tennessee to a 60-57 win against Arkansas State in a pivotal Sun Belt Conference showdown at Murphy Center Thursday night.

Haddock scored 17 and collected a career-high 12 rebounds for his first double double, Desmond Yates tied for game-high scoring honors with 18 and tied his career high with three steals and Nigel Johnson scored 10 points, pulled eight rebounds, dished out six assists and collected two steals as Middle Tennessee (12-7, 6-2) won for the eighth time in 10 games and remained one game out of first in the SBC standings. Arkansas State dropped to 12-7 overall and 4-4 in SBC play.

The Blue Raiders just missed placing four players in double figures as Kevin Kanaskie finished with nine points, three assists and no turnovers to pull to within six assists of tying Gerald Harris' all-time mark of 463. He did all of this despite playing the second half with a lower back injury suffered late in the first half against the Red Wolves.

Arkansas State guard Donald Boone led the Red Wolves with 18 points, five rebounds and four steals, and teammate Shawn Morgan narrowly missed a double double with 12 points and nine

rebounds.

It was an interesting game pitting longtime friends in Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis and Arkansas State Head Coach John Brady. Davis served as Brady's Associate Head Coach for five seasons and the two have a longstanding relationship that covers three decades. Like most games in the series under Davis, this one also would go down the wire, although somewhat unexpectedly as the game had played out.

Middle Tennessee entered the game 8-2 against Arkansas State under Davis with eight of the 10 games decided by nine points or less, including five by three points or less and two in overtime. The latest installment offered more the same as Johnson hit the first of two free throws to extend Middle Tennessee's lead to 60-57 with two seconds remaining and the Blue Raiders held on for the win.

The Blue Raiders seemingly had the game in hand with a 59-48 lead following Haddock's mid-range jumper with 3:48 remaining, particularly considering the quality defense and offensive execution it had exhibited for a long stretch of time; however, it got interesting in the final three-plus minutes.

Middle Tennessee went without a field goal, turned the ball over four times and missed four-of-five free throws during the next 3:43 - after Haddock's last field goal - and the Red Wolves took advantage and pulled to within 59-57 with seven seconds remaining.

Johnson was fouled with five seconds remaining and missed the front end of the one-and-one but his hustle play enabled him to get the offensive rebound and he was fouled and returned to the line with two seconds remaining - this time for two free throws.

Johnson made the first to extend the lead to 60-57 but missed the second and immediately fouled Mike Lance, who missed the front end of the one-and-one as the Blue Raiders finally sealed the win to remain unbeaten in league play at Murphy Center.

The Blue Raiders trailed by five, 11-6, early but used a strong run keyed by Yates go on to 23-15 with 5:29 remaining in the first half. Yates missed his first two field goal attempts but followed with seven straight makes. He had 16 of his 18 in the first 17 minutes. His 3-pointer with 4:24 remaining in the first half staked Middle Tennessee to a 26-17 advantage on its way to a 30-22 halftime edge.

Arkansas State closed to within 40-38 with 13:22 remaining but Middle Tennessee answered with a 16-5 run that climaxed with Yates' dunk to put the Blue Raiders ahead 56-43 with 7:50 remaining.

NOTES: Kermit Davis moved into a tie for eighth on the Sun Belt's All-Time Coaching wins list with his 57th league win against Arkansas State. Davis tied former WKU coach Darrin Horn. Next on the list is former VCU coach J.D. Barnett with 59. The total only includes regular season wins ... Desmond Yates surpassed the 1,200-point mark with 18 against Arkansas State. Yates has 1,201 career points and needs 14 to tie John Price (1,215) for 14th on the all-time scoring list ... Kevin Kanaskie moved closer to becoming the all-time assists leader at Middle Tennessee with three helpers against Arkansas State. Kanaskie has 457 career assists and is seven shy of breaking Gerald Harris' (1986-90) record of 463 that has stood almost 20 years ... Including limiting Arkansas State to 57 points Thursday, Middle Tennessee has held 11 of its 19 opponents to 65 points or less and they are 9-2 in those games with the only losses being at Vanderbilt (65-57) and at WKU (63-61) ... Middle Tennessee improved to 84-15 (10-0 this season) when leading at the half and 96-12 (9-0 this season) when leading with five minutes remaining under Davis.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes
Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis
On tonight's game:
"I thought at short periods of time our team played with some resistance defensively. We moved the ball well offensively. I give Arkansas State a lot of credit because they were down two guys and still played well in the second half. I'm really disappointed with our senior guards. Kevin Kanaskie's been hurt with a back problem but they didn't play like senior guards at the end, we're fortunate to win. We're 6-2 (in the Sun Belt) but we still have to get better."

On going to a zone defense in second half:
"I thought we matched up good in the zone. They played some good set plays against it but we were there on the catch and made them miss and then we got in a better rhythm offensively. Montarrio Haddock had some good shots, so did Desmond Yates, he just didn't make them in the second half. Then they made a couple baskets so we went back to our man."

On the play of newcomers Montarrio Haddock and Demario Williams:
"Montarrio was our best player tonight. Even the shots he missed were good shots. Demario has been our best practice player the last week and half. He's been the most eager to come to the gym and that's why his minutes went up. Really we were better when he was on the floor and I should've kept him at one of the guard spots even down the stretch."

On Demetrius Green's health:
"He's physically O.K. but he's not playing O.K. He's just not the same guy. We're going to watch a lot film tomorrow from last year when he played well down the stretch and even the Tennessee game this year because we have to get him going. He's just been absolutely no factor lately."

Junior forward Montarrio Haddock:
On his play up to this point of the season:
"I just have to keep my hands off the other guys on defense. Most of my rebounds tonight came off of my own shots. They weren't boxing me out so I just got the ball back."

On effectiveness when not fouling out:
"If I stay out of foul trouble I can be that effective for my team."

On getting more in shape:
"I was out of shape at the beginning of the year but I've lost some weight and I feel better. I still need to lose some more but I feel a lot better now."

Junior forward Desmond Yates:
On getting back on the winning track:
"We had two tough losses on the road. They were two games I thought we should have won; we just didn't play very well. I don't think we lost anything from the previous week we just wanted to come out with more energy tonight and we did that except for the last two minutes."

On the last two minutes:
"We have to finish games. We were up 11 with two minutes to go and we just stopped executing. We're going to watch the film tomorrow and learn from what we did wrong and do better in the next few games."

On pre-game ceremony:
"I'm happy to be a member of the 1,000 point club. I know Kevin (Kanaskie) is happy to be a member of it as well. I'm happy to come here and be that productive. A lot of people didn't think I was going to be this productive so I'm very happy. I have to give a lot of credit to my coaches and especially coach Davis. He has always believed in me and he has helped me become a better player."

Freshman guard Demario Williams
On role for the team:
"I just have to come in, bring some energy, and not turn the ball over. I feel like that's my role."

On confidence growing during the game:
"I had a good week of practice and that carried over to help me have more confidence in the game tonight."

Arkansas State Head Coach John Brady
On tonight's game:
"We're at a whole different place than were Kermit (Davis) is with his team. We are trying to figure out who we are and what we need to do to win. On the other hand, I know Kermit is not happy with how his team closed the game; however, if Middle Tennessee was picked to be the best in the conference, and they have the preseason Player of the Year and I'm out two guys that normally start for me, there are some positives in there for our team. That's how I left it with our team.

"If you help enough other people get what they want, then you get what you want. And that's the approach our team has got to have especially against this team on the road. We made too many little mistakes on the road. But we've got a game on Saturday and a chance to be 5-4 at the halfway point."

On the difficulties of scoring against the Middle Tennessee second half zone:
"The zone bothered us a little bit, but I thought we were able to penetrate and pass to the high post then we couldn't make the play. It was a good move by Kermit. He knows what he's doing. Despite all that we got back in the game, but couldn't finish."

On coming back without two key players:
"The right things have been instilled in this team: competitiveness, toughness, bite, and you never give up regardless of the situation around you. We did enough of this to keep ourselves in the game to give ourselves a chance. To play the top teams in this league on the road you've got to take it to another level."

On Eric McKinney walking out during halftime:
"I'll have something to release on that tomorrow."

On the quality of play in the Sun Belt Conference:
"It's real balanced. I don't think it is as top heavy as it was last year. I was able to see the tournament and watch Western (Kentucky) and South (Alabama). It seems like five or six teams have the chance to win it if you win enough close games."

"A successful season is all a team's ability to win close game especially when the league is so even.

Our execution down the stretch was not what it needed to be and I know Kermit wasn't happy with the way they finished this game."

On if Eric McKinney will play on Saturday verse FAU:
"That's the good thing about being the head coach is that anything is salvageable. I'm not concerned about anybody else but the team and its development. I've never been a guy to fire someone on the spot without giving the person a shot at redemption. He (McKinney) will have the opportunity to see what kind of man he is. He may quit on his own because it will be too difficult for him to get back, but I doubt seriously he will play on Saturday. Walking out on your team doesn't sit well with me."

Arkansas State Forward Shawn Morgan
On missing post players:
"Anytime you are missing a player on a team, you are missing chemistry. You have to do other things to make up for it. We have to come back as a team."

On getting into a late game deficit that the team was unable to get out of:
"We had a lot of individual problems as a team in the first half. We didn't rebound well and in the second half we rebounded better and communicated better on defense. The team bought into the offense more in the second half which allowed us to get back into the game."

On missing free throws late in the game:
"Anytime you get free throws you've got to knock them down. That's why they are free. We practice them all the time so we can make them when we need them."

On the absence Eric McKinney and JeJuan Brown:
"JeJuan is very athletic and plays in and out on the wing. Eric is a big body inside that would open up a lot for us inside. But sometimes you've got to play through what happens."

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