Kanaskie, Davis reach milestones in 83-76 win against Cajuns

Blue Raiders climb to within half-game of first in tight SBC East

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee began the second half of SBC play in the thick of a hotly-contested league race against Louisiana and used outstanding offensive balance to climb within one-half game of idle WKU for first place in the East Division following an 83-76 win against the Ragin' Cajuns at Murphy Center Thursday night. The Blue Raiders (13-8, 7-3) had five players reach double figures led by Kevin Kanaskie's game-high 18. **Budding star Montarrio** Haddock contributed 15 points off the bench and Calvin O'Neil and Demetrius Green netted 14 points each. Desmond "Boogie" Yates finished with 11 points and Nigel Johnson just missed double figures with nine as the Blue Raiders remained unbeaten in five conference games at Murphy Center. Johnson did tie O'Neil for game-high rebounding honors with eight. Kanaskie, who is playing with a back injury suffered last week against Arkansas State, managed to play 28 minutes and dished out three assists to tie Gerald



Harris' all-time mark of 363. He also knocked down two 3-pointers to pass Tommy Gunn (185) and move into second on the career 3-point field goals made list with 186. The win also provided Head Coach Kermit Davis with the 250th victory of his career. While coaches and teammates were reaching milestones in victory, O'Neil was the chief star in a game that featured several. O'Neil's 14 points and eight rebounds were season highs and he was just one shy of his career high of nine rebounds. It wasn't so much when O'Neil scored as it was when he scored. It was O'Neil's 3-pointer with 11:58 remaining in the first half that put Middle Tennessee ahead, 18-16, and after the Ragin' Cajuns tied the game at 16-16 it was O'Neil that knocked down a mid-range jumper to extend the lead back to 18-16. O'Neil's jumper with 17:35 remaining provided Middle Tennessee a 38-30 advantage which at that point was its largest lead of the game and was part of a 7-0 run to start the second half and turn the contest in the Blue Raiders' direction for good. Even when Louisiana (7-13, 4-5) tried to come back, O'Neil was there to provide the dagger. He stopped a Cajun run with a 17footer midway through the second half to extend Middle Tennessee's lead to 13, 48-35. It would ignite a run that enabled the Blue Raiders to surge ahead by as many as 17, 61-44, with 8:06 remaining. He added another long 3-pointer five minutes later after the Cajuns had closed to within 11. Haddock also was dynamite and scored 11 of his 15 after halftime when Middle Tennessee started to pull away. He has scored double figures in five of the last eight and he tallied nine points in two of the three games that he failed to reach double figures. Middle Tennessee led 33-30 at the half but used 52 percent shooting (12-of-23) to establish itself in the second half. The Blue Raiders will return to action Saturday when they play host to Louisiana-Monroe. Tipoff at Murphy Center is 7 p.m. NOTES: Blue Raider Head Coach Kermit Davis notched career win No. 250 in Thursday's game vs. Louisiana. Davis' total includes a 184 wins at the Division I level and 66 in three years at the junior college level ... Kevin Kanaskie tied Gerald Harris for the all-time assist lead with three against Louisiana. Kanaskie now has 463 for his career. Kanaskie also moved into second on the all-time 3point field goals made list with two against the Cajuns, giving him 186 and moving ahead of Tommy Gunn (185). Kanaskie also moved to within one start of tying Gunn for most career starts (96) and he tied Gunn for most games played in a career (113). He is eight games shy of tying Kerry Hammonds (121) for most games played in a career ... With 18 points against the Cajuns, Kanaskie passed Fred Allen (1,108) for 20th on the all-time scoring list at Middle Tennessee. He now has 1,112 ... Desmond "Boogie" Yates scored 11 points against the Cajuns to surpass 1,225 for his career. Yates has 1,234 and is nine shy of moving into 13th on the all-time list ... Calvin O'Neil's 14 points and eight rebounds against the Cajuns were season highs. O'Neil has scored double figures 14 times in his career and the Blue Raiders are 12-2 in those games ... Montarrio Haddock has scored double figures in five of the last eight games, including 15 off the bench against the Cajuns. He scored nine points in two of the three games that he failed to reach double figures during this stretch ... Nigel Johnson's eight rebounds against the Cajuns tied his season high ... Middle Tennessee improved to 36-1 under Davis when scoring 80 or more, including 21 consecutive wins ... The Blue Raiders are also 86-15 under Davis when they lead at the half and 97-13 when they lead with five minutes remaining. They also improved to 94-13 under Davis when outshooting the opposition ... Middle Tennessee is 4-1 on Thursday. Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes

Head Coach Kermit Davis

On tonight's game:

"I saw periods of time in the game where our team played really good basketball. We moved the ball better tonight than we've done the last few games. We got more guys involved in the offense. It's great to see Calvin O'Neil play well, score 14 points and get good shots. If Nigel Johnson made a couple more free throws at the end we would've had six guys in double figures so the balance of scoring was good tonight. We still need to get better defensively but it was a good win against a very

good team in our conference." On Kevin's play with injury:

"Kevin shocked me tonight. I had in mind to only play him 20 to 25 minutes and he ended up with 28. He got an epidural shot yesterday and he said it really helped. He's just one of those guys. You hate to have anyone play hurt, but if I had to chose I'd chose Kevin." **On run to start second half:**

"We played well. Then when we went to our bench and Montarrio Haddock played really well. He's not been rebounding the ball like he was earlier this season and we have to get him back doing that but he and Calvin really got us going and made some nice mid-range shots. I just thought our offensive execution was good in the second half." **On practice this week:**

"We watched the whole game on tape in New Orleans before we left. I wanted to leave all of that down there. So we just tried to be tough and disciplined, but with a lot of enthusiasm and energy. That's the only thing you can do. We missed a great opportunity because we didn't play very well, but we didn't try to kill them. We even added music to start the first 20 minutes of practice or so, just to try something different. Right now it's about emotion and energy, but our parts are there and we're going to be fine." **On tight race for the conference:**

"I think everybody would like to have a four or five game lead, but the balance of the league is just too good. UL-Monroe is going to come in here Saturday and play well too. There are some good players in our league, and teams are starting to get healthier. I think it's enjoyable, I hope our fans will come out and enjoy it. It's something that hasn't happened here in a while to be right in the middle of the race. We still have a long way to go but hopefully they'll enjoy it and we'll have a big crowd on Saturday." **Senior guard Kevin Kanaskie:**

On awareness of assists:

"I read the article in (The Daily News Journal) but it never even crossed my mind during the game. I was just trying to play defense and take care of the ball. I didn't do a good job of that, I had too many turnovers tonight." **On back injury:**

"My back was fine tonight and hopefully it will be for the rest of the year. I do have to be conscious of it, just take it day by day, but it was fine tonight." **On opponent's assist to turnover margin:**

"I think the more aggressive we are on defense the better we are. Nigel's steal early got us going and the more we pressure them and get into transition it seems like the more we score." **On Nigel and Demetrius Green's play tonight:**

"They both played well tonight. We haven't been playing well at the guard position lately. I thought they were more aggressive and made good shots. Calvin needs to keep scoring too and we'll be fine." **Junior forward/guard Calvin O'Neil:**

On confidence tonight:

"My confidence has been building the last few games and practice. Coach Davis has been telling me he wants me to be more aggressive. I've been making them in practice so he told me to shoot them in the game." **On winning at home:**

"We think this could be the turning point in our season as a team. We haven't been playing well as a team and we played better tonight. We were tougher tonight, and that was big." **Louisiana Head**

Coach Robert Lee

Opening Comments:

"We had 12 turnovers at halftime. That is way too many for one half, but we came into the locker room only down three. We didn't get a great performance from some of our starters and were still only down three at the half. We were in pretty good position, and then we started the second half without getting any big defensive stops. "I thought the game was really won on their perimeter from the one to four positions. They were tougher than our perimeter. You could see the experience in (Kevin) Kanaskie and Nigel (Johnson). Demetrius Green was really noticeable from a toughness standpoint and that was really why we lost it." **On the Desmond Yates being taken out early in**

foul trouble and Louisiana's forwards not being able to take advantage:

"If don't get production from our forwards, we are going to struggle. I told them in the locker room, they are marked and other teams are going to go after them and be very tough. If you don't do the things we work on to get off screens and set your guy up, it will be very difficult for you to get open. The guys from Middle Tennessee were tougher around the perimeter." **On getting the ball inside vs. Middle Tennessee:**

"When you are being guarded aggressively, you have to really stay fundamental and get the ball in when you have the opportunity. You are only going to get a second or so to enter the ball on the post when you need to. We were not tough enough on the perimeter to enter those passes when we needed to."

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