

Slow start to second half dooms Blue Raiders in 70-64 setback at Troy

Haddock, Williams bright spots in defeat

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TROY, Ala. - It was a tale of two halves as Middle Tennessee suffered a 70-64 setback to Troy in a key SBC game in front of a season-high 2,735 at Trojan Arena here Thursday night. The Blue Raiders (15-10, 8-5) started both halves slow but they were able to overcome the sluggish beginning to the game and led 30-25 at halftime; however, they were unable to rise above an even slower start to the second half that ultimately cost them the game. Troy (16-10, 11-3) won for the ninth straight time and moved to within one-half game of idle WKU for the SBC East lead with a strong second half that included outscoring Middle Tennessee 45-34. The Trojans started the second half on a 30-6 run as the Blue Raiders' slim halftime lead quickly evaporated and they suddenly were buried by a barrage of 3-pointers. Montarrio Haddock's second career double double led Middle Tennessee as he tied his career high with 19 points and equaled his career high with a game-high 12



rebounds. Desmond "Boogie" Yates finished with 18 points and six rebounds, and freshman Demario Williams was a bright spot with a career-high 12 points on 4-of-6 shooting. Unfortunately, for Middle Tennessee, its collection of senior guards was not as good. Demetrius Green, Nigel Johnson and Kevin Kanaskie were a combined 2-of-19 from the field, including 1-of-12 from 3-point

range, and a highly uncharacteristic seven turnovers. Troy jumped out to an 11-1 lead in the game's first six minutes but the Blue Raiders answered with a 13-2 run to take their first lead, 14-13, on Calvin O'Neil's jumper with 9:32 remaining. The first half remained back-and-forth from there before Middle Tennessee went on top 24-20 on O'Neil's 3-pointer with 4:08 remaining in the half. The Blue Raiders closed the half with Haddock's layup to head into the half with a 30-25 lead. Williams, a freshman who enjoyed a breakout performance in a clutch road game, was the primary reason for Middle Tennessee's first-half comeback. The Culleoka, Tenn., native scored 10 first-half points and established a new career high in the first 20 minutes. He was 4-of-4 from the field in 14 minutes of action in the opening half. In fact, Williams represented 30 percent of the team's offense when he was on the court in the first half. Haddock also was strong in the opening half as he muscled his way for eight points and four rebounds and keyed a surge provided by the reserves. In fact, the Blue Raider bench provided 20 of the team's 30 first-half points. Yates scored the first two points of the second half to give Middle Tennessee its largest lead, 32-25 with 18:55 remaining but things quickly went downhill from there as Troy outscored the Blue Raiders 30-6 to go up 55-38 on Brandon Hazzard's 3-pointer with 5:59 remaining. The Blue Raiders were 1-of-15 from the field in the first 12 minutes of the second half and they didn't hit consecutive shots until Yates and Haddock converted consecutive shots with less than eight minutes remaining. Trailing 56-38 with 5:29 remaining, the Blue Raiders still had some fight left in them and eventually cut the deficit to as few as six points but time ran out on the comeback bid before it could be completed. Middle Tennessee shot 57 percent (12-of-21) in the first half but just 32 percent (11-of-34) in the second half. It launched 20 3-point attempts but only managed to hit four. The Blue Raiders won the rebounding battle 38-26, fueled by Haddock's 12 caroms, but the troublesome stat was their 18 turnovers. The Blue Raiders return to action against North Texas at Murphy Center Saturday. Tipoff has been moved to 5 p.m., for the CSS broadcast.

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