Kanaskie, Yates combine for 46 to key Blue Raider road win against FIU

Middle Tennessee secures 71-66 triumph; faces WKU Saturday

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MIAMI, Fla. - Kevin Kanaskie and Desmond "Boogie" Yates combined for 46 points to lead Middle Tennessee to a vital 71-66 road win at FIU here Thursday, enabling the Blue Raiders to move into a tie for the No. 4 seed for the upcoming SBC Championships. Kanaskie and Yates provided 65 percent of Middle Tennessee's offense but the road win was manufactured by a complete team effort that stymied the Golden Panthers early and allowed the Blue Raiders to lead wire-to-wire as they improved to 17-12 overall and picked up their second consecutive road win. "This was a good win against a team that has been playing well and a lot of teams have found it difficult to win here of late," Middle Tennessee Head Coach Kermit Davis said. "We came out strong and that good start was crucial to set the tone for the game. You know FIU is going to make a run, they have too good of players, so I'm proud of the effort and the way our guys handled their business." In addition to the strong play of Kanaskie and Yates, reserve guard Eric Allen, who made his first career start, continued his superlative play with eight points, a team-high eight rebounds and three assists, and Nigel Johnson contributed six points, six rebounds, two assists and no turnovers. Montarrio Haddock, Demetrius

Green, who is still recovering from a nagging ankle injury, and Dino Hair combined for nine points off the bench. Kanaskie and Yates scored 23 points each and combined to hit 14-of-26 field goals, including 6-of-11 3-pointers. Kanaskie knocked down four 3-pointers and moved into 15th on the all-time scoring list at Middle Tennessee with 1,222 points, passing John Price (1,215). Yates surpassed the 20-point mark for the 25th time in his career, including 11th this season, with his 23 points. The win enabled Middle Tennessee to notch its 30th SBC road win under Davis, which is the second-most of any league member since 2002-03. The Blue Raiders picked this one up when they needed it and continued late-season momentum heading into Saturday's regular-season finale against WKU. Middle Tennessee was particularly sharp early, vaulting to a 13-3 lead and never losing its early lead, although FIU made a strong second-half charge the Blue Raiders were able to endure with clutch plays down the stretch. The Blue Raiders led 32-20 at the half and stretched the lead to 43-26 on Allen's dunk with 16:04 remaining but the Golden Panthers had a run left and used strong perimeter shooting and the inside attack of Freddy Asprilla to mount a comeback. Josue Soto led FIU with 17 points and Asprilla finished with a double double with 13 points and 13 rebounds. Each time FIU pulled close, Middle Tennessee had an answer. It usually came in the form of a Kanaskie or Yates dagger. Kanaskie drained a jumper with 7:26 remaining after FIU cut the lead to 54-50 and Yates followed that with a runner in the lane to stretch the advantage back to eight, 58-50, with 6:37 remaining. The back-breaker for FIU was Kanaskie's 3-pointer on the baseline after the home team had pulled to within 62-58 late. Kanaskie, one of the most prolific 3-point shooters in Blue Raider history, knocked down the clutch trey to extend the lead back to seven, 65-58, with 2:48 remaining and the Blue Raiders hit pressure-packed 3-pointers down the stretch to secure the win. Kanaskie and Yates combined for 11 consecutive points in a five-minute span with the game on the line to help key the win. Middle Tennessee shot 48 percent (22-of-46), including a sizzling 57 percent (12-of-21) in the second half, and it was 44 percent (7-of-16) from 3-point range for the game. The Blue Raiders' defense was stifling in the first half, limiting the Golden Panthers to 28.6 percent (8-of-28) from the field and 0-of-9 from beyond the 3-point line. FIU heated up in the second half, shooting 55 percent and they scalded the nets from 3-point range to the tune of 64 percent (7-of-11) but Middle Tennessee made the winning plays down the stretch to secure victory. Middle Tennessee will face rival WKU in the regular-season finale at Murphy Center Saturday at 7 p.m., in a regionally-televised game on CSS. It will be "Senior Night" as Green, Johnson and Kanaskie are honored in a pregame ceremony. **NOTES:** Kevin Kanaskie moved into 15th on the all-time scoring list at Middle Tennessee with 24 vs. FIU. Kanaskie now has 1,222 points, surpassing John Price (1,215) ... With 23 points at FIU, Desmond "Boogie" Yates has scored 20-plus points 25 times in his career, including 11 this season. The Blue Raiders are 19-6 in those games ... Nigel Johnson moved into ninth on the all-time assists list (280) and ninth on the all-time steals list (89) at Middle Tennessee .... Middle Tennessee improved to 15-5 all-time against FIU, including 12-2 under Davis ... The Blue Raiders notched their 71st win against SBC opponents under Davis and their 30th SBC road win, which is tied for the second most of any league member since Davis' hiring in 2002-03 ... Davis moved into sixth on the SBC's all-time wins list with his 61st win at FIU. The total does not include SBC Championship games ... Middle Tennessee utilized its 10th different lineup in the win vs. FIU ... The Blue Raiders improved to 89-17 under Davis when they lead at the half (14-2 this season) and they are 100-13 under Davis when leading with five minutes remaining ... Eric Allen played a career high 31 minutes at FIU, marking the second straight game he has registered a career high for minutes.

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