

Blue Raiders Fall To Ragin' Cajuns In SBC Quarterfinals

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DENTON, Texas - Middle Tennessee's hopes for a Sun Belt Conference Tournament title were derailed as the Blue Raiders suffered a 71-57 setback to defending champion Louisiana-Lafayette in front of 1,091 at the Super Pit Sunday night. The Blue Raiders (19-12) struggled offensively and were dominated on the boards as the Ragin' Cajuns (18-10) took control of the game midway through the first half and never looked back. "The better basketball team won tonight," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "We are one of the best rebounding teams in the league and

Louisiana-Lafayette just dominated us on the boards and around the glass throughout the game. They got every loose ball and made all the hustle plays." While the loss ended Middle Tennessee's tournament, the Blue Raiders remain hopeful the season is not over as they await the possibility of a berth in the National Invitational Tournament. "We will have to wait and see," Davis said. "We have the second most wins in the Sun Belt behind Western Kentucky and if we could host a first-round game against a Vanderbilt or Memphis I believe we could have the best attendance of any first-round game in the NIT. That's our selling point." Seniors Mike Dean and Michael Cuffee were the only Blue Raiders to tally double figures, finishing with 17 and 15 points, respectively, while junior Fats Cuyler finished with nine points. The Ragin' Cajuns, on the other hand, had four players in double figures, led by Tiras Wade's 27-point performance. Louisiana-Lafayette collected 39 rebounds, including 13 offensive boards, while the Blue Raiders finished with 26 and were uncharacteristically whipped on the glass. The Cajuns turned the offensive boards into 18 second-chance points and scored 21 points off 19 Middle Tennessee turnovers. Louisiana-Lafayette also dominated around the goal and owned a 32-10 advantage on points in the paint. Middle Tennessee started well with Fats Cuyler connecting on three straight 3-pointers and Dean adding another to lead 13-10 with 15:35 remaining in the first half; however, the Blue Raiders were outscored 21-5 over the next 13 minutes as the Cajuns seized a 31-18 lead and never looked back. The Blue Raiders managed just eight field goals in the first half and had just 10 in the second half in shooting

37.5 percent for the game. **NOTES:** Mike Dean knocked down a season-high five 3-pointers and to give him 115 career treys ... Bryan Smithson connected on both of his free-throw attempts and stretched his consecutive streak to 27 ... The 26 rebounds were the fewest for Middle Tennessee this season ... Middle Tennessee was held to 25 points below its 82-point per game average over the last five games ... Michael Cuffee started his 53rd consecutive game as a Blue Raider against the Ragin' Cajuns. Cuffee had his 48th career double-figure scoring game.

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