Team Effort Takes Care of Rice, 4-3

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee won the doubles point and Kai Schledorn clinched the match in a tiebreaker to help the 42nd-ranked Blue Raiders defeat 26th-ranked Rice, 4-3, Sunday afternoon at the Jake Hess Tennis Stadium in Houston, Texas.

Middle Tennessee improved to 12-3 on the season and should move into the mid-30's in next week's ITA rankings, released on Tuesday. The Blue Raiders stubbed their toe two weeks ago against Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, but head coach Dale Short felt like his team made up for the mistake with a win over the highly-rated Owls on Rice's homecourt.

"This is a win we really needed, especially after the setback two weeks ago," Short said. "We wanted to make amends and we used that as a motivating factor in winning both of these matches this weekend. It really puts us in the driver's seat for the conference tournament next month so long we finish the season well."

The Blue Raiders got contributions from everyone in the lineup to take the victory, including wins at Nos. 2 and 3 in doubles and Nos. 3, 4 and 6 in singles.

Middle Tennessee's 41st-ranked double tandem of Brandon Allan and Schledorn lost at No. 1 to Rice's Robert Searle and Ben Harknett, 8-5, but the 18th-ranked Blue Raider duo of Andreas Siljestrom and Marco Born defeated Tony Hearle and Filip Zivojinovic, 8-3, at No. 2.

That set up the deciding match for the doubles point at No. 3, where Blue Raiders Greg Pollack and Anant Sitaram outlasted Jason Mok and Rodrigo Gabriel, 9-8 (3), for an early 1-0 lead.

In singles the matches went very evenly, with Hearle defeating Born, 7-5, 6-4, at No. 2, and Ralph Knupfer winning 6-3, 6-2, at No. 5 over Pollack for the Owls. For Middle Tennessee, Sitaram defeated Zivojinovic, 6-2, 7-5, at No. 4, and Allan won 6-1, 6-1, over Gabriel at No. 6.

Schledorn's victory clinched the match for Middle Tennessee, with the sophomore taking a 6-3, 7-6

(6), decision against Harknett at No. 3. The final match on the court went to Rice, with the 41st-ranked Searle defeating 55th-ranked Siljestrom, 6-2, 5-7, 7-5.

Middle Tennessee returns home next weekend to face Georgia State on March 26 at Noon at the Buck Bouldin Tennis Center.

#42 Middle Tennessee 4, #26 Rice 3

SINGLES

1. (41) Robert Searle (RU) def. (55) Andreas Siljestrom (MT), 6-2, 5-7, 7-5
2. Tony Hearle (RU) def. Marco Born (MT), 7-5, 6-4
3. Kai Schledorn (MT) def. Ben Harknett (RU), 6-3, 7-6 (6)
4. Anant Sitaram (MT) def. Filip Zivojinovic (RU), 6-2, 7-5
5. Ralph Knupfer (RU) def. Greg Pollack (RU), 6-3, 6-2
6. Brandon Allan (MT) def. Rodrigo Gabriel (RU), 6-1, 6-1

DOUBLES

1. Searle-Harknett (RU) def. (41) Allan-Schledorn (MT), 8-5
2. (18) Siljestrom-Born (MT) def. Hearle-Zivojinovic (RU), 8-3
3. Pollack-Sitaram (MT) def. Jason Mok-Gabriel (RU), 9-8 (3)

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