Blue Raiders top Golden Panthers 3-1 for Championships title

Mead named MVP after knocking down 17 kills

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee took its first win of the season over Florida International in its most important match of the season as it defeated the Golden Panthers 3-1 (25-21,25-19, 18-25, 25-15) to win the Sun Belt Championships. The Blue Raiders (25-8) took a 2-0 lead in the match over FIU (30-3) and then dominated the fourth set to take the win and earn an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. It will be the Blue Raiders fourth straight appearance in the national tournament and its third automatic bid in four years. "I think all of us had a really good feeling going into the match. We had a point to prove after losing the two previous meetings. I think FIU though they were going to come in and roll over us and we showed them that was not going to happen. FIU is an outstanding team and I think they will have a good run in NCAA tournament this year and I think our team is playing very, very well and we are looking forward to post season play," head coach Matt Peck said. Senior Ashley Mead, the Most Valuable Player in the tournament, led the Blue Raiders with 17 kills for a .353 hitting percentage as she was 17 for 34. "Ashley Mead what a story that is. She made second team all-conference as a senior, which is her only award and then MVP of tournament stepped it up when team really needed her to do so. On top of everything she has a comprised knee and for her to play as hard as she did was truly amazing," Peck said. Sophomore Stacy Oladinni added depth to the offense with 12 kills of her own for a .435 attack percentage and aided the frontline defense with eight block assists. Junior Izabela Kozon posted a double-double with 11 kills and 13 digs while senior Ashley Waugh and sophomore Brynne Henderson added 12 and 11 digs respectively. The Blue Raiders had 59 kills for a .373 attack percentage while posting 11 total blocks. Senior Janay Yancey, named All-Tournament, had 12 block assists on the night with just two errors overall. Yancey also posted a .667 attack percentage with six kills. Janay Yancey is a fairytale story after transferring from a last place team for her to finish first-place her senior year is amazing. She had an incredible year. These past couple of weeks we have focused on her blocking and she has been working on it and tonight it really paid off. Senior Leslie Clark, named All-Tournament, recorded 42 assists on the day with four kills, three service aces, six digs and two block assists. The two schools began the match by trading points but the Blue Raiders pulled ahead by four, 14-10, at the halfway mark. FIU took a short lead but Middle

Tennessee bounced right back going ahead 21-18. A kill by Mead gave the Blue Raiders a 25-21 win and a 1-0 lead in the match. Middle Tennessee carried the momentum of winning the first set into the second as a kill by Kozon gave it a 6-1 lead. The Golden Panthers did not give up and battled back to within four-points, 15-11, after trailing by eight. The Blue Raiders kept the pace and after a block by Clark and Yancey took a six-point lead, 21-15. Mead led the team with seven kills at the break while Oladinni had six and Kozon and Yancey each had five. Yancey also led the front row defense in the first two sets with seven block assists while Oladinni had six. Middle Tennessee's front line had 11 total blocks at the break while FIU had just three. The Blue Raiders also had 30 kills for a .387 hitting percentage while holding FIU to a .029 attack percentage with 20 kills. FIU came back from the set break strong to take an early 7-4 lead over Middle Tennessee. While the Blue Raiders battled they were unable to go ahead as FIU took a 12-7 lead. The Blue Raiders cut the deficit to four, 17-13 as the Golden Panthers called a time out. Middle Tennessee kept fighting but could not close the gap as FIU took a 25-18 win. Middle Tennessee began the fourth set strong jumping out to a 5-0 lead. The Blue Raiders pulled ahead by six, 13-7, after a block by Mead and Yancey. Middle Tennessee kept the pace taking a seven-point lead, 18-11, on a kill by Kozon. A kill by Mead gave the Blue Raiders a 22-15 advantage in the set. The Sun Belt Championships championship match will air on CSS Sunday, Nov. 22 at 5 p.m. and on Cox Sports Television on Monday, Nov. 23 at 6 p.m. The Blue Raiders will be back in action on Nov. 28 at 3 p.m. when it faces Saint Louis in Saint Louis, Mo., in its last match of the regular season. The 2009 NCAA Tournament selection show will air on ESPN News at 2 p.m. CDT on Sunday, Nov. 29. It is a 30-minute selection show which will announce all pairings and sites for the 2009 NCAA Volleyball Championships.

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