Blue Raiders come up short in hard-fought battle at UAB

Strong defense, Haddock lead way

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. - Middle Tennessee used a strong defensive effort and got key performances from Montarrio Haddock and Theryn Hudson but fell one point short in a hard-fought, 65-64, loss at UAB Wednesday night.

In a game that went back-and-forth all night with 16 ties and 20 lead changes, it was a key turnover and a couple of missed open jumpers that kept the Blue Raiders from pulling the upset in a great college basketball game in front of 3,207 at Bartow Arena.

"We had a great defensive effort tonight, controlled their point guard, and competed all over the floor," said Kermit Davis. "But a couple of mistakes down the stretch cost us the game and you have to give them credit for making plays when they had to tonight."

The Blue Raiders (3-4) tied the game at 59-59 with 55 seconds to play before UAB answered with two free throws by George Drake to regain the lead. On the next possession, Middle Tennessee called a timeout with 26 seconds left to set up a play for Haddock. The senior took the pass, had his first option taken away, and then drove hard to the basket when he was called for traveling.

UAB (7-1) took advantage by making a three-point play to take a 64-59 lead. After a dunk by Hudson, James Washington hit a three-pointer with three seconds left to provide the final margin.

Haddock paced the Blue Raiders with a game-high 17 points on 5 of 9 shooting while Hudson added 12 points on 6 of 8 shooting. Rod Emanuel had nine points and James Washington chipped in seven. Haddock, Emanuel, and J.T. Sulton, making his first career start, led the way on the glass with five rebounds each.

The Blue Raiders employed a zone defense to slow down the fast-paced Blazers and held leading scorer Elijah Millsap seven points below his season average. Middle Tennessee was also dominant on the glass by winning the battle of the boards, 32-25, as seven players had at least three caroms.

"This game was very similar to the Marshall game where we had chances to win but made mistakes at the end," added Davis. "It was good experience for our team and I think we can build on this because there were a lot of positives tonight, especially on defense."

The Blue Raiders opened the second half by grabbing their largest lead at 39-34 behind five points from Haddock but the Blazers rebounded quickly. UAB, behind a three-pointer from Aaron Johnson and a three-point play from Kenneth Cooper, went on an 8-0 run to grab a 42-39 lead.

But like they did all night, the Blue Raiders answered. Freshman James Gallman scored his first points of the game on a beautiful drive in the paint, was fouled and completed the three-point play to tie the game. After a long three-pointer by Jamarr Sanders, Haddock fired back with one of his own to knot the game at 45. From there the game see-sawed back-and-forth until the final seconds.

In the first half, the Blue Raiders played tough, hard-nosed defense and used a balanced attack to go to the locker room tied at 29. Neither team led by more than four points the entire 20 minutes, but the defensive effort was the best of the season.

Haddock, Emanuel, and Sulton sparked the strong first half showing by combining for 19 points and nine rebounds. Haddock led the way with seven points, while Emanuel, on the strength of two three-pointers, and Sulton added six points each.

The Blue Raiders will return to action next Tuesday at home against Belmont as all-conference performer Desmond "Boogie" Yates is expected to make his season debut. Tip-off is scheduled for 7 PM.

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