Blue Raiders fall 3-2 to Rams in NCAAs

Kozon leads team with 20 kills

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FORT COLLINS, Colo. - Middle Tennessee lost a heartbreaker to No. 25 Colorado State 3-2 (19-25, 25-16, 21-25, 25-17, 6-15) in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Thursday night. Neither team played exceptionally well but the Rams played well in the fifth set in addition to capitalizing on the Blue Raiders' mistakes to seal the win. Junior Izabela Kozon led the team in kills with 20 for a .226 hitting percentage while sophomore Stacy Oladinni added seven kills and three block assists. Senior Ashley Mead also aided the offense with nine kills of her own. As a team, the Blue Raiders had 52 total kills for a .179 attack percentage which was eight more kills than CSU who had a hitting percentage of .164. "Honestly, I would say it was us and that we didn't come out like we should have come out. Some things were not falling the right way for us, we weren't getting up on time and there were a lot of disconnects," Oladinni said. Errors hurt Middle Tennessee as it had 16 service errors, seven reception errors and five block errors. The Rams had a number of errors as well with 13 service errors but only had three reception errors and one block error as they were able to capitalize on Middle Tennessee's mistakes. "I think it was one of the most poorly played matches I have ever been associated with and I'm pretty sure Tom would say the same thing. I don't think either of our teams found their rhythm and we out hit them by 15 points," head coach Matt Peck said. "Everything was pretty even across the board and they beat us by two points total in the match. The match to me seemed to take forever. I think neither of us are accustomed to playing that kind of match with lots of service errors." The Blue Raiders are accustomed to playing fifth set matches in the first round of the NCAA Tournament as they have done so in each of their last four appearances. It is the first time under head coach Matt Peck that the Blue Raiders have lost a first round match in the national tournament. It is just the fourth fifth set match the Blue Raiders played this season posting a 2-2 record. The last time Middle Tennessee played a fifth set match was a 3-2 win over Arkansas State on Oct. 9. Middle Tennessee started the match slow trailing 6-3 but won three straight points to tie the set at 6. The Blue Raiders continued to play well but CSU took a 12-10 lead after a bad set by

Clark. Middle Tennessee used its second time out after a kill by Plourde put the Rams up 17-13. CSU used the early lead to its advantage and while the Blue Raiders matched it point for point Middle Tennessee could not overcome the deficit. The Rams took a 1-0 lead in the match after a service error by Waller handed them the win. Middle Tennessee posted a hitting percentage of just .067 in the match with nine kills. Errors hurt the team in the first set as it had seven service errors in addition to two reception errors and three block errors. CSU also had seven service errors in the set but had no reception or block errors while posting a hitting percentage of .192 with eight kills. The Blue Raiders used the first set loss as motivation headed into the second set. The team took a 9-4 lead forcing CSU to call a timeout and then won the next two points extending its lead to seven, 11-4. Middle Tennessee continued to stay ahead while the Rams battled but kept its lead at seven, 17-10 as CSU used its final timeout. The Blue Raiders continued to play well and a kill by Kozon tied the match at one. The Blue Raiders picked up the pace in the second set and after the break had dramatically improved its statistics. Middle Tennessee had 22 total kills for a .177 attack percentage with Kozon leading the way with 10. The two teams traded points to begin the third set but a block by Yancey and Clark gave Middle Tennessee a one-point advantage, 7-6. At the 15-point media timeout, the Blue Raiders led by four, 15-11. The Rams kept fighting and pulled ahead 18-16 after two kills by Minch as the Blue Raiders called a timeout. Middle Tennessee then lost three straight points to trail by five, 21-16 and was forced to use its final timeout. The Blue Raiders kept fighting going on a 5-2 run cutting the lead to two-points, 23-21, but CSU pulled out the win after a kill by Plourde to take a 2-1 lead in the match. To begin the fourth set, the two teams battle with the Blue Raiders taking the lead first going ahead four-points, 11-7. Middle Tennessee continued to push ahead extending its lead to seven, 17-10, as the Rams called a timeout to regroup. The Blue Raiders continued to perform well and after multiple errors by CSU took the 25-17 win to tie the match at 2 and force a fifth set. CSU jumped out to a quick 4-0 lead to begin the fifth set as the Blue Raiders called a timeout to regroup. The Rams did not let up going on a 4-2 run to take a six-point lead, 8-2 at the eight-point break. Middle Tennessee could not get the offense in order as CSU continued to control the fifth set as it extended its lead to eight, 12-3. The Blue Raiders did not give up and continued to fight the rest of the set before falling 15-6. The Blue Raiders end the 2009 season with a 25-10 overall record. Middle Tennessee also won the Sun Belt Championships for the third time in four seasons on its way to its fourth consecutive appearance in the national tournament.

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