Blue Raiders down Hilltoppers on final shot

Washington drains three for win; defense holds in final seconds

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Junior James Washington hit a three-pointer with 8.1 seconds on the clock to give the Blue Raiders a 47-46 lead and the defense came through in the clutch giving Middle Tennessee the win on Monday night over rival Western Kentucky. In front of 3,605 strong, the Blue Raiders led throughout the game trailing only after two free throws by Western Kentucky's Jeremy Evans with 1:22 remaining. Middle Tennessee took a time out and drew up the play to go for the win and snap a two-game losing streak. "I'm just really proud for our players and fans who have sat through a few losses in a row to Western Kentucky. It was a great atmosphere tonight; our fans packed it unbelievable and willed us to win at the end," head coach Kermit Davis said. With 6.2 seconds on the clock, Western Kentucky called its final timeout to draw up what it hoped would be a game winning play. Middle Tennessee came back from the timeout defending strong without fouling as the Hilltoppers were unable to get a shot up until right at the buzzer.

"In the huddle we said we're not going to lose. There was no way we were going to lose this game. Everyone just looked at each other and said we were going to stick together and win this game," senior Desmond Yates said. "We showed them something different the last play of the game and they didn't know what to do against us. Montarrio did a great job at top on AJ Slaughter and got the ball out of his hands. Then at the corner, Calvin did a great job on Anthony Sally so we were just

determined to win and it paid off in the end." It was the first win for the Blue Raiders in eight tries to the Hilltoppers with the last win coming at Murphy Center as well on Feb. 23, 2006. Middle Tennessee played tremendous defense throughout the night with 37 rebounds overall and 12 on offense. Senior Calvin O'Neil had seven on the night while senior Montarrio Haddock added eight and Yates posted seven of his own. "Calvin did an incredible job guarding A.J. Slaughter. Everything Western got was tough and everything we got was tough. I'm just really proud of our guys that we can shoot 37%, go 6-11 from the free throw line and still beat a team that has some really quality wins," Davis said. "Coach told me to stay on top of him (Slaughter), run out all of the screens and make sure I'm breathing down his back. I got help with Washington and (James) Gallman with their guards which made it a lot easier for me to D him up. It was big and we've been working on it in practice," O'Neil said. "The crowd helped a lot. They were like our sixth man out there and we just fed off of their energy all night." Middle Tennessee shot 37.3 percent from the field with Yates leading the team with 14 points. Haddock added to the offense with 11 of his own as the only other player in double figures. The Blue Raiders made 6 of 11 free throw attempts with Yates making three of his four opportunities. Western Kentucky shot 34.1 percent in the game with this week's Sun Belt Player of the Week Steffphon Pettigrew leading the way with 12 while AJ Slaughter added 11. Western Kentucky took a 10-2 run midway through the second half but Middle Tennessee maintained 39-34 lead with six minutes to play. Then a shot from behind the arc by Pettigrew cut the Blue Raider lead to one 39-38 less than a minute later. Middle Tennessee took a 6-0 lead to begin play and never looked back taking a ten point lead at the half, 25-25. With four minutes remaining O'Neil hit a layup to may 18-9 in favor of the Blue Raiders and then a jumper by Haddock put the score at 20-12 forcing the Hilltoppers to take a timeout. The Blue Raiders shot 41.4 percent in the first half while playing good defense with 21 rebounds. Western Kentucky was held to 21.1 percent shooting with just four field goals, two of which were from behind the arc. Haddock led all scorers with nine points while O'Neil led the defense with five rebounds. The Blue Raiders will have the rest of the week to prepare for Louisiana-Monroe and its second meeting with Western Kentucky. Middle Tennessee will play at ULM on Thursday, Jan. 21 at 7 p.m. before playing at Western Kentucky on Saturday, Jan. 23. Tip-off in Bowling Green, Ky., is set for 12 p.m. and will air on ESPN2 as the Sun Belt game of the week.

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