Blue Raiders to honor six seniors on Saturday

Team will face South Alabama at 7 p.m.

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The 2009-10 Middle Tennessee senior class has been the epitome of perseverance, patience and persistence during their careers. Theryn Hudson, Calvin O'Neil and Desmond "Boogie" Yates have all been through their own individual injuries. Hudson's career has been impacted the most as he has played just 17 games over the last two seasons due to recurring injuries. As a junior, he led the Sun Belt in field goal percentage and that same season led the team in field goals, rebounds and blocks. Last season, Hudson appeared in seven games before an injury sidelined him for the year. He started the first seven games of this season before a similar injury sidelined him again. Hudson returned and played in three games but aggravated the injury and is now back in practice looking to end his Blue Raider career on the court and not the sideline. O'Neil has been the least injured of the three as of late but missed his junior season due to an injury. The Newark, N.J., native has been a steady is the race player doing what was needed of him when it was needed. This season though O'Neil has looked like the player he was before his injury two years ago. "Boogie, T and I have been talking about winning a championship for a long time. We saw how the seniors went out last year and we talked about it and said we want to go out at the top. Every level I have played on I have left with a championship so this would be big to leave here with one," O'Neil said. "It is big to able to come back. When I first got injured I didn't know if I would even play again. Drew (Shea) pushed me with my treatments and they are really paying off now. Right now it's paying off and its great time for it to happen because we can really make a run here at the end." In the last nine games, he is averaging

9.8 points per game and his scoring average during the stretch is double what it was to begin the season. O'Neil has also been a leader on defense holding opponents' top scorers to below their normal per game scoring averages. Over the span, O'Neil has 39 rebounds, eight steals and three blocks. Last night, O'Neil held Troy's leading scorer, Brandon Hazzard, and did not allow him to get a field goal in the game. O'Neil ended the game with a team high 18 points and pulled down seven rebounds. Yates may be the most impressive of the group when it comes to perseverance and overcoming injuries. The Sommerville, Tenn., native entered the season needing 213 points to become the school's all-time scoring leader. Yates who has battled through a number of injuries in his career, took a redshirt his freshman season after an injury, had two offseason injuries at the conclusion of the 2008-09 season and sustained another injury in pre-season practice this season causing him to miss the first seven games. When he returned to the floor it did not take him long to find his groove as he had two 20 point games in his first two appearances and scored in double figures in four of his first five games. Yates set the all-time scoring record with 28 against his rival, Western Kentucky, on ESPN 2 as the Blue Raiders defeated the Hilltoppers on the road for the first time in his career and swept the series for the first time since the 1974-75 season. "I pride myself on being able to play through injuries. When I missed those seven games I was just ready to get back. I sat on the sidelines and saw how I could be helping the team. In the first games back I was eager and words can't explain how ready I was to be back on the floor. Playing hurt and getting through all of it is just another way I can help the team get better," Yates said. In 21 games this season, Yates has scored in double figures in 16 games and has grabbed six or more rebounds six times. In his career, he has 1,706 points, 480 rebounds, 49 blocks and 62 steals. Hudson, who graduated last year, is on pace to earn his second degree in December of 2010 while O'Neil and Yates will both graduate in May. Montarrio Haddock and Josh Jones have a different story as they began their collegiate careers at the junior college level. The former high school rivals played together at Brunswick Community College and patiently waited for their opportunity to play at the Division I level. The duo led their junior college team to the regular-season Region 10 championship and a 25-5 record before joining the Blue Raiders two seasons ago. Haddock immediately emerged as a leader guiding the team in rebounds last season and is at the top of the list in three categories this season. Jones has provided depth off the bench when called upon. In Sun Belt action, Haddock rates in the Top-15 in scoring, rebounds, field goal percentage and free throw percentage. He has been one of the most consistent free throw shooters and had a stretch of 11 games where he missed just six, 44-50, at the line. "It means a lot to me because no one in my family has had the opportunity except for my mom. Everyone else in my family has faltered and not really done anything with their life so it means a lot to me to have this accomplishment," Haddock said. "It means a lot to be able to finish the season in first place. We would get a bye in the tournament and get our legs more rest going in." In the last 11 games, Haddock has had only five games with less than eight rebounds and has double figuring scoring in all but one game. Middle Tennessee is 9-3 in that span. This season he has had eight or more rebounds and not scored in double figures just once. Haddock is scheduled to graduate in August and Jones is on pace to earn his degree in December of 2010. Matt Joines is a shining example of how persistence and hard work can make a dream become a reality. The Murfreesboro, Tenn., native began his career at Hanover College and tried to walk-on to the team last season but an injury kept him from being able to so head coach Kermit Davis let him be a manager. Joines did everything asked of him in his managerial role and at the end of the year talked to the staff about joining the team as a student-athlete for the 2009-10 season. The coaches told him what he needed to do so he quickly got to work getting in-shape, worked on his shooting, defense and footwork. He has played in five games this season but the most memorable will be Houston Baptist. The Blue Raiders had 14 three-pointers in the game and were knocking on the door of the

school record for three-pointers in a game. With a minute left, he took a shot from behind the arc and made the record tying shot. Joines will graduate in May. This senior class will be remembered for a number of things. In Yates, the all-time leading scorer, O'Neil a consistent defender and Haddock a solid player, but all six of these student-athletes are examples of how perseverance, patience and persistence payoff and can help one accomplish anything they set their mind to.

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