Blue Raider women's tennis opens Sun Belt play with hard-fought win

Middle Tennessee starts 2010 with 4-0 record

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JONESBORO, Ark. - Middle Tennessee women's tennis returned to the courts after a near two-week break and gutted out a hard-fought, 4-2 victory Friday evening at Arkansas State in the Sun Belt opener for both schools in Jonesboro, Ark., to remain perfect on the young season.

"We knew going in this match would be a complete dogfight," head coach Alison Ojeda said. "We trained harder than normal before our time off and had to battle through some injuries today. But, the best thing I can say about this match was it proved to us that our practices from the very beginning have been good and the day-in, day-out effort everyone gives pays off. Everyone has been accountable for their own hard work and it showed tonight."

The Blue Raiders captured two of the three doubles matches to take the opening point. The No. 2 pairing of Anna Djananova and Yuiri Nomoto began the trio of contests with a solid 8-2 win against the Red Wolves' Maria Aleman and Tina Ojdanic. Arkansas State (1-4, 0-1 Sun Belt) then bounced back to even the score with an 8-3 decision by Jenny Herring and Menna Kamal over MT's Taylor Coffey and Alex Dachos at the No. 3 spot.

The decisive point came down to a solid match at No. 1. The Blue Raiders' top tandem of Natalie Araya and Marietta Bigus prevailed by pulling out a 9-7 triumph against Elne Barnard and Rone van Wyk, clinching the point in Middle Tennessee's favor.

In singles action, the Blue Raiders earned three wins among the five matches which were completed to seal the victory. Because the match ended after midnight and Middle Tennessee (4-0, 1-0 Sun Belt) had already locked up the win, the No. 6 singles contest was called after Coffey took a 2-1 first set lead against Ojdanic.

Bigus clinched the match win for the Blue Raiders, fighting through a 7-5, 6-1 win at the No. 5 position against Aleman. The triumph kept Bigus undefeated on the season, one of two MT singles players to post unblemished 4-0 marks thus far.

The other perfect 4-0 ledger belongs to Yuiri Nomoto, who competed at the No. 3 singles spot Friday. The freshman took her match to three sets after dropping the first set before garnering a 1-6, 6-4, 7-6 (5) triumph against van Wyk, the reigning Sun Belt Athlete of the Week. Coffey is also undefeated, owning a 3-0 mark despite her unfinished match against ASU.

Middle Tennessee picked up its final singles win at the No. 4 slot with Djananova handing Kamal a 6-2, 7-5 loss in straight sets.

"I could not be more proud of the effort we displayed today, fighting through much adversity. Yuiri proved to herself and showed what type of player she is capable of being in a very competitive match in a rowdy environment, especially during the third set. It truly showed what she is made of, and for a freshman to finish the job, was awesome to watch.

"Anna also battled through a tough match, especially in the second set. She had a 5-2 lead before her opponent came back to tie it. We talked briefly at the change and I assured her that she could do it. She gave it her all and it showed in the win."

The Blue Raiders top two singles players, Carla Nava at No. 1 and Natalie Araya at No. 2, both dropped their first matches of the campaign for the lone Red Wolves points.

Middle Tennessee will continue its road conference swing with an 8 a.m. Sunday match at UALR in Little Rock, Ark.

Middle Tennessee 4, Arkansas State 2

Singles
No. 1 Elne Barnard (ASU) def. Carla Nava (MT) 6-2, 6-4
No. 2 Jenny Herring (ASU) def. Natalie Araya (MT) 6-3, 6-2
No. 3 Yuiri Nomoto (MT) def. Rone van Wyk (ASU) 1-6, 6-4, 7-6 (5)
No. 4 Anna Djananova (MT) def. Menna Kamal (ASU) 6-2, 7-5
No. 5 Marietta Bigus (MT) def. Maria Aleman (ASU) 7-5, 6-1
No. 6 Taylor Coffey (MT) vs. Tina Ojdanic (ASU), 2-1 (unf.)

Doubles
No. 1 Araya/Bigus (MT) def. Barnard/van Wyk (ASU) 9-7
No. 2 Djananova/Nomoto (MT) def. Aleman/Ojdanic (ASU) 8-2
No. 3 Herring/Kamal (ASU) def. Coffey/Alex Dachos (MT) 8-3

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