

Blue Raiders Sun Belt Tourney Title Bid Falls Short

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee volleyball's quest for a Sun Belt Championship fell one game short as the Blue Raiders lost to No. 1 seeded Western Kentucky 3-2 (30-21, 26-30, 30-25, 26-30, 8-15) Saturday in front of a school record crowd of 1,028.

The Championship finals, which were telecast on ESPN+, was a match-up of the two titans in the Sun Belt. Middle Tennessee, which was the No. 2 seed in the tournament, and Western Kentucky had combined for a record of 58-5 entering the tournament finals. With the loss, Middle Tennessee falls to 28-4 on the season and Western Kentucky improves to 31-2 on the year.



The Lady Toppers earn an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament by way of winning the Sun Belt Championship title. Middle Tennessee still has an outside chance of getting an at-large bid in the NCAA and will find out its fate on November 27 when the selection show is telecast at 2:30 p.m. on ESPN News.

Middle Tennessee outdid Western Kentucky on almost every statistical category but just couldn't get the breaks to fall its way in the final two games of the match. The Blue Raiders had a .254 attack percentage to Western Kentucky's .193 and also had 32 block assists to the Toppers 26. The one stat that fell in Western Kentucky's favor and helped turn the match was the Lady Topper's 11 service aces to Middle Tennessee's five.

The Blue Raiders were paced by all-tournament standouts Andressa Lyra and Quanshell Scott, who combined for 42 kills and 11 block assists. Lyra tallied a tournament-high 25 kills while Scott contributed 17 kills on a .577 percentage.

ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM: Amila Baracovic, UALR (Fr., OH) Kim Muller, Denver (So., MB)

Andressa Lyra, MT (Jr., OH) Quanshell Scott, MT (So., MB) Megan Argabright, WKU (Fr., MH)
Caron Blotch, WKU (Sr., S)

Tournament Most Outstanding Player: Jenna Gideon, WKU (So., MH)

QUOTES:

BLUE RAIDER HEAD COACH MATT PECK: "We came out and had a game plan to win this tournament and we almost did it. I knew we needed to win game four but we had a couple of mental breakdowns and Western Kentucky jumped all over it. I just looked out there at the last point in game five and thought we have our whole team back next year and some very good recruits. I told the players you have to picture yourself on that floor holding that trophy when they are taking those pictures and hold that in your head for 365 days. I think this will be a motivation for us."

ON THE CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT: "I think the match today put together the two best teams in the tournament and it was a great match that was highly contested and it showed with the atmosphere and the fans in the stands. They had a lot of people and we had a lot of people and it was a record-setting crowd. It was amazing. I am very proud of our team. There is nobody on the planet that would have said we were that close to winning the Sun Belt Conference Championship when we started the season."

SOPHOMORE MIDDLE BLOCKER QUANSHELL SCOTT: "I think our team was ready for the match today. We came out onto the court playing with a lot of heart and it was surprising how everyone came out to play after the way we played Western Kentucky the last two times. We felt we were going to go out and do what we had to do. I felt we had to win two to help our chances in winning the match. When we lost game two that to me gave Western Kentucky confidence. I told the team, after we lost game two, that we gave them back their confidence. I said now we have to bring their confidence right back down. I thought we had game four but it didn't go the way we had planned and but we still fought as hard as we could."

JUNIOR SETTER MEGAN SUMRELL: "I strongly believed that both teams [Middle Tennessee and Western Kentucky] belonged in the championship. We looked like a totally different team then the last two times we played Western Kentucky. We came out ready to play and firing hard. I think if you put it in percentages, we played about 95 percent in regards to the best match we have played all year, and we needed just that other five percent to get us over the hump and win the tournament."

WKU HEAD COACH TRAVIS HUDSON: "It's almost disbelief. It certainly hasn't sunk in yet. Middle Tennessee was tremendous. I'm not sure I wasn't out-coached today. This just had to do with a whole bunch of players who didn't quit."

ON MT's NCAA tourney at-large chances: "I'd love to see it for the league and for Middle Tennessee. You would be hard-pressed to find 64 teams in the country better than them, particularly with the way they played today."