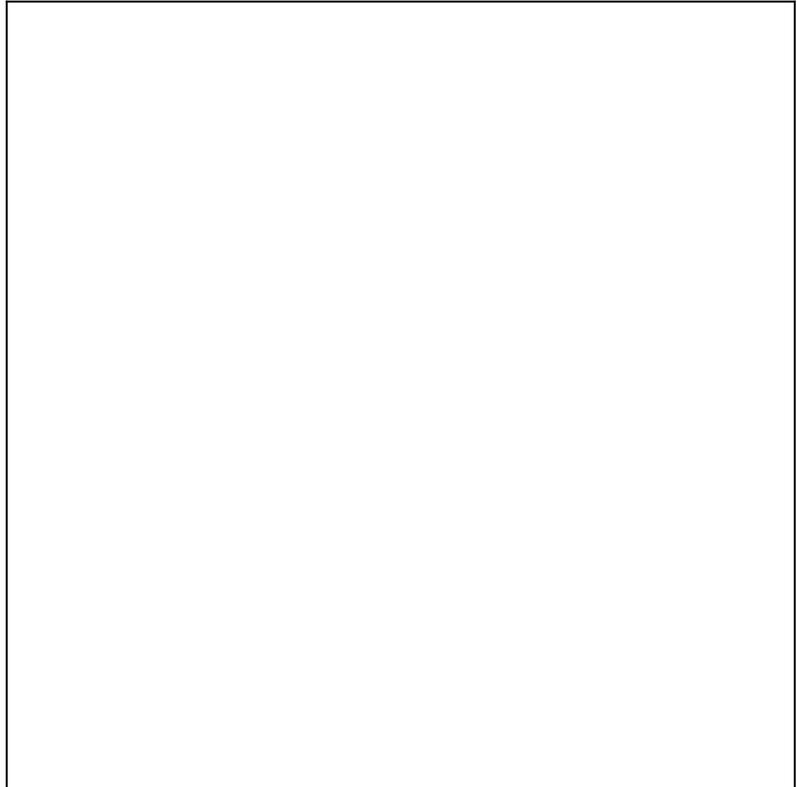


Late Rally Not Enough as Blue Raiders Fall to NDSU 65-58

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FARGO, N.D. - The Middle Tennessee women's basketball team (4-3) orchestrated a late rally in the second half, but North Dakota State's (2-3) first half performance was too much for the Blue Raiders to come back from as the Bison took the game 65-58 Sunday in Bison Sports Arena.

"We didn't quit and we got back into the game," said Head Coach Rick Insell. "We would do something good and then take a bad shot or not get a rebound and take the momentum away from ourselves. There are going to be days like this and we just have to learn from them."



It took almost four minutes for the Blue Raiders to score one point, to start the game, which allowed North Dakota State build a 9-0 lead. Middle Tennessee's first point of the game came from Chrissy Givens who hit the back end of two free throws at the 16:11 minute mark.

The Blue Raiders first field goal of the game came when Tia Stovall hit a lay-up with 15:30 left. With the score 9-3, the Bison went on a 14-0 run to balloon the lead to 17-3. Stovall scored Middle Tennessee's second field goal of the game with 12:22 left to make the score 17-5.

Middle Tennessee managed to put together a few drives in the final 12 minutes of the game, but North Dakota State continued to pressure the Blue Raiders and score. The Bison ended the first half on a 13-12 run to take a 30-17 lead in the locker room. The 17 points scored by the Blue Raiders is the second lowest scoring output in the first half in school history.

"We didn't execute or rebound in the first half," Insell said. "We're not a good enough basketball team to let them [North Dakota State] have five shots under the basket without grabbing a defensive rebound and plays like that cost us the game."

The cliché that it was a tale of two halves is very appropriate for the Blue Raiders. After scoring just 17 points in the first half, Middle Tennessee more than doubled its scoring output in the second half recording 41 points and holding North Dakota State to just 36. Middle Tennessee committed 10 turnovers in the first half and had just six in the second half and allowed the Bison to score 18 points off Blue Raider turnovers.

Krystle Horton scored the first bucket for the Blue Raiders in the second half when she picked up a steal and scored on transition to trim the Bison lead to 11. South Dakota State answered and even pushed the lead up to 14, with 14:08 left, when Katie Lorenz hit a three-pointer to make the score 36-22.

Lorenz's bucket was the last field goal North Dakota State would hit for almost five minutes, however, the Bison were 4-of-4 from the free throw line. The Blue Raider defense held the Bison and gave the Middle Tennessee offense a chance to cut the NDSU lead. With 10:12 left to play Tia Stovall hit 1-of-2 free throws trim the Bison lead to five.

After a pair of Bison free throws pushed the lead back to seven, sophomore Monique Martin hit a huge three-pointer to put the Blue Raiders in the game again and make the score 38-34. North Dakota State did what they had done all game, they pushed the tempo and went on a 6-0 run to push the Bison lead back to 10.

Middle Tennessee looked to be down, but the team proved they weren't out. Down by seven with 3:54 remaining, freshman point guard Johnna Abney hit her only bucket of the afternoon and it was a big one, draining a three from the top of the key to cut the Bison lead to four 51-47.

It looked like Middle Tennessee had the momentum, but Lorenz answered for North Dakota State with a lay-up with 3:33 left to give the Bison a six-point lead. With the clock waning and the Blue Raider chances running out, Givens hit one of the biggest shots of the game when she hit a three from the corner to cut the lead to three, the smallest of the game, with 3:19 remaining.

A Blue Raider foul on Kayla Dahlen with 2:45 left put her at the free throw line and she hit them both to push the score to 55-50. The Bison hit their free throws down the stretch and it was the key to the game, as they hit 9-of-12 from the charity stripe in the final 2:45 of the game.

Middle Tennessee's chance to take the lead in the game was lost at the free throw line. The Blue Raiders hit just 8-of-14 from the line, including two huge missed free throws by Horton with 8:32 which would have cut the Bison lead to four.

Middle Tennessee shot just 36.1 percent from the field and was out-rebounded by the Bison 41 to 34. The Blue Raiders were also 5-of-16 from the three-point line, hitting all five three-pointers in the second half.

"We played good defense in the second half," Insell said. "We got up the line, we hustled and we got turnovers. I am proud of our effort in the second half."

Givens led all scorers with 23 points, her fifth consecutive game to score 20 or more points. Stovall recorded her first double-double of the season with 15 points and 10 rebounds.

Middle Tennessee will return home on Thursday December 8 to take on Georgia State in the Murphy

Center. Tip-off is set for 7 p.m.

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