Stirring Blue Raider comeback falls short at No. 10 Louisville, 76-68

December 21, 2005 · MT Media Relations

LOUISVILLE, Ky. - A stubborn Middle Tennessee team put forth a stirring comeback effort against No. 10 Louisville in the opening round of the Billy Minardi Classic, but the host Cardinals held off the rally in the final minute and escaped with a 76-68 win in front of 18,884 at Freedom Hall Tuesday night.

Junior guard Adam Vogelsberg led a balanced Middle Tennessee attack with 14 points on the strength of 11-of-11 shooting from the free-throw line, in the process becoming only the 10th player in program history to shoot 100 percent from the stripe with a minimum of 11 attempts. Kyle Young, who entered the game No. 4 in the nation in field goal percentage, continued his sensational season with his third career double double, ripping a career-high 12 rebounds and scoring 10 points on 3-of-5 shooting from the field.

Tim Blue (13 points, 5 rebounds), Marcus Morrison (11 points) and Bud Howard (10 points, 5 rebounds) also tallied double figures for Middle Tennessee (5-3). Decisive for the Blue Raiders was the early foul trouble for senior guard Fats Cuyler, the team's leading scorer and leader on the court. Cuyler played just six minutes in the first half and four in the second before fouling out. He finished with three points, 11 below his average.

The game, which was described as "bizarre" by Louisville coach Rick Pitino, saw the teams combine for 67 free throws and 53 fouls, as well as the ejection of Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis, who was hit with consecutive technical fouls with 15:55 remaining and the Blue Raiders trailing, 43-34.

After Davis was ejected, Louisville's Taquan Dean hit four straight free throws to extend the lead to 47-34, but the Blue Raiders (5-3) responded by outscoring the Cardinals 29-16 over the next 12 minutes and cut the lead to 66-63 with the ball and under four minutes remaining.

"I'm very proud of our players and our staff and the way they responded to the situation," Davis said, responding to questions regarding his ejection and the team's composure during his post-game press conference.

Davis' ejection was actually out of the ordinary and bordered the absurd. He was hit for his first technical during a timeout while responding to Blue Raider junior Bud Howard, who had just been called for a personal foul.

"Bud Howard was complaining about the call and I was on Bud telling him, 'It was a good call. Play with your feet, hands away,'" Davis explained. "(Howard) tried to justify it again so I turned around to take him out and the ref (Karl Hess) tees me up, and then the other guy (William Bush), I don't know, I guess he was wanting to throw me out, so he threw me out. I haven't been thrown out before and you need to get your money's worth more than that, but I was telling my player it was a good call and then all of a sudden you get thrown out. I didn't understand that at all. I hated it happened."

Following the ejection, Davis approached the Louisville bench, wished Pitino good luck the rest of the season and told him, "I am leaving."

"I didn't know what was happening," Pitino said. "(Davis) said he was leaving and I said, 'OK.' I didn't know where he was going. I wish I could have gone with him. As long as I have been (coaching) basketball, there is no way to explain what happened out there tonight. It was the most interesting interpretation of the rules I have ever seen."

Louisville (7-1) led 40-31 at the half and appeared to be on the verge of breaking the game open when stretching its lead to 13, 49-36, which was its largest of the game to that point. The Cardinals increased the advantage to 51-36 with 13:36 remaining. That's when the Blue Raiders made their valiant comeback under Associate Head Coach Donnie Tyndall, Davis' right-hand man who assumed his duties following the ejection.

Middle Tennessee whittled the lead to nine, 58-49, on Blue's 7-foot jumper, and then closed to within 58-52 when Blue drained a 3-pointer with nine minutes remaining, prompting Pitino to call a timeout.

"That team (Middle Tennessee) we played tonight was a tough team," said Dean, who was limited to 10 points on 3-of-9 shooting. "We were just glad to get out of here with the win."

Blue completed a 19-10 run over a five-minute stretch with a layup to cut the Louisville lead to 66-63 with 4:23 remaining. The Blue Raiders forced a big stop and had the ball with a chance to tie out of a timeout. Vogelsberg's jumper of the stoppage was off the mark and Louisville's Brandon Jenkins connected on consecutive back-breaking jumpers to seal the Cardinals' win. Jenkins lead all scorers with 20 points.

"I'm really proud of our players and the manner in which they fought back under some very tough circumstances," Tyndall said. "We were able to put together a good run and give ourselves a chance to win against a quality basketball team because the guys stepped up and made plays. It just didn't

work out in the end."

The game was virtually even from a statistical standpoint. Middle Tennessee won the rebounding battle, 35-32, and it shot 38 percent to Louisville's 47. The Cardinals shot 27 percent from 3-point range, while the Blue Raiders shot 26 percent, and both teams shot better than 75 percent from the free-throw line. Middle Tennessee was guilty of 15 turnovers, but also forced 13.

The Blue Raiders will face Florida Atlantic, which is coached by former Notre Dame and North Carolina coach Matt Doherty and joins the Sun Belt next season, Wednesday at 4:30 p.m.

Printed on May 23, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/4681