

# Second-half scoring drought dooms Blue Raiders

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## BOWLING GREEN, Ky. -

Coaches generally point to the first five minutes of each half as critical areas in a basketball game, but the final 65 seconds of the first half proved to be decisive as Western Kentucky turned back Middle Tennessee, 80-48, in front of 5,979 at Diddle Arena Saturday night.

- **Photos:** [Game Photo Gallery](#)

The two teams put together a solid 19 minutes to start the game and Middle Tennessee (7-6, 0-1 SBC) trailed 32-31 with under 1:30 remaining before the intermission; however, the Hilltoppers used consecutive steals and subsequent baskets to go on a 8-0 run over the final 1:05 and carried a 40-31 lead into the locker room.

If that run didn't do the damage, then a second half scoring drought certainly hurt any chances Middle Tennessee had of pulling the road upset against the preseason favorites to win the Sun Belt's East Division. After each team exchanged three baskets at the start of the second half, Middle Tennessee struggled to score from the field as the Hilltoppers (10-4, 2-0) broke the game open.

The Blue Raiders went 17:06 without scoring a field goal in the second half and managed just



eight points on free throws during that stretch as Western Kentucky build its lead to 20-plus points and never let up on the way to handing Middle Tennessee its first loss in a conference opener under Kermit Davis. Overall, the Blue Raiders were outscored 40-17 in the second half.

"I don't think I have ever had a team go 17 minutes without scoring a field goal," Davis said. "I can't remember that happening, and I didn't realize we went that long without one tonight. Some of that was Western Kentucky and some of it was us. We had some shots around the goal and just couldn't make them."

Marcus Morrison and Kyle Young were among the few bright spots for Middle Tennessee as each narrowly missed a double double and accounted for all but 16 of the team's points and more than half of its rebounding. Morrison finished with a team-high 17 points and nine rebounds. Young added 15 points on 6-of-9 shooting from the field, while also adding nine rebounds.

While Morrison and Young were a combined 11-of-20 from the field, the remaining Blue Raiders were a collective 5-of-36 for 14 percent as Middle Tennessee scored a season-low 48 points and tied the season low for field goals made (16). Part of the reason for Middle Tennessee's recent ineffectiveness on offense has been the inability of Cuyler and Voglesberg - the team's leading scorers - to find their shooting touch from outside.

The tandem combined to shoot 2-of-15 from the field and 1-of-11 from 3-point range, scoring eight points.

"Fats Cuyler and Adam Vogelsberg are excellent shooters and our two leading scorers but they aren't able to hit a basket right now," Davis said. "That's just the way things are going. They are getting good looks and they are going to be fine but right now it's been a struggle offensively and then we compound those problems by making unforced errors and giving up easy baskets. If you aren't shooting well offensively then you need to be doing a good job rebounding and getting back on defense."

As a whole, Middle Tennessee struggled in both areas against the Hilltoppers, who pulled down a whopping 51 rebounds, including 19 offensive, and outrebounded the Blue Raiders by 17. Western Kentucky also shot 48 percent and was able to reach its scoring average of 80 points, which leads the Sun Belt. The Hilltoppers' three main contributors led the way as Courtney Lee scored a game-high 19 points, followed by Anthony Winchester (14) and Elgrace Wilborn (11).

"I don't think this score in any way, shape, or form, is indicative of Middle Tennessee," Western Kentucky coach Darin Horn said. "We were able to put together a very good offensive game, we rebounded the ball well, especially getting offensive boards and second and third shots, and that made a big difference. Middle Tennessee is a very good basketball team and they are well coached. They just had a bad shooting night tonight and that happens sometime."

It appeared Middle Tennessee had a productive halftime as evidenced by connecting on 3-of-4 shots to start the second half. The Blue Raiders trailed, 47-38, when Tim Blue connected on a layup at the 17:24 mark; however, Middle Tennessee would miss 20 consecutive field goal

attempts before Young scored on a layup with 18 seconds remaining to end the drought.

The Blue Raiders will look to get even in the Sun Belt race when they play Arkansas State at Murphy Center Thursday at 7 p.m.

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