Volleyball falls at sixth-ranked Illinois, 3-1

Kozon, Cheatham named to All-Tournament Team

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CHAMPAIGN, Ill. - After winning the opening set, the Blue Raiders fell in the next three to lose at No. 6 Illinois 3-1 (25-23, 18-25, 16-25, 12-25) in the State Farm Illini Classic championship match. "I thought we started out great. We competed with them, we did some really nice things, and taking a set from them at their place was big," said head coach Matt Peck. "But I think our inexperience began to show, and we needed to be able to push back. When we learn how to do that, I think we're going to be a pretty good team." Middle Tennessee was led offensively by Izabela Kozon for the third straight match with 14 kills, and Alyssa Wistrick was second on the squad with 9. Morgan Peterson was responsible for directing the offense much of the night and tallied 31 assists. Brynne Henderson tied for a match-high with 12 digs, and Lindsay Cheatham contributed five total blocks to the Middle Tennessee defense. Following the match, both Kozon and Cheatham were awarded All-Tournament honors. The Blue Raiders found themselves down for much of the first set, but thanks to the efforts of Cheatham, Middle Tennessee managed to fight back and win 25-23. After going down 20-22, the junior recorded kills in two of the next three serves and teamed up with Szivos for a block to tie the set at 23. Wistrick recorded a kill, and Cheatham closed out the set with an impressive block. Illinois would tie the match in the second frame thanks to an impressive run midway through the set. After Middle Tennessee fought to gain an 11-10 edge, the Fighting Illini rattled off eight of the next nine points to take control at 17-12. Later in the set, U of I put the game out of reach with another four point run to stretch the lead to 23-15, eventually winning 25-18. Coming out of the break, Illinois utilized an impressive run to win the third set 25-16. After the Fighting Illini opened with an early lead, Middle Tennessee slimmed the margin to one at 13-14. Illinois responded by reeling off four consecutive points and six of the next seven to stretch the advantage to six, ultimately grabbing a 2-1 match lead. U of I finished off the fourth set strong, taking advantage of an early four point run to take 6-11 lead and inched the advantage up to seven before running off eight of the last nine points to win the final set 25-12. Middle Tennessee will now head home to host the Blue Raider Bash next weekend. The three-day event will feature four matches for the Blue Raiders, including Duke, Southern Miss, Auburn and Miami (Fla.). The tournament will begin for the Blue Raiders on Friday with a match vs. ACC foe Duke at 7 PM.

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