

Davis earns career win 200 as surging Blue Raiders win third straight

February 4, 2006 · MT Media Relations

MIAMI, Fla. - On a night for milestones and homecomings, Middle Tennessee freshman Calvin O'Neil enjoyed a coming-out party as the Blue Raiders stormed from behind to beat Florida International 66-64 in front of 1,224 at Pharmed Arena. The win provided Blue Raider fourth-year coach Kermit Davis with his 200th career victory as a head coach, while three Florida natives on the Middle Tennessee roster - Tim Blue, Fats Cuyler and Marcus Morrison - all factored heavily as the team won three straight for the first time this season. However, it was O'Neil who was the difference-maker as he scored 11 points, pulled six rebounds, and played 22 minutes - all career highs - to help rally the Blue Raiders from a nine-point second half deficit as Middle Tennessee (11-9) won its third straight for the first time this season and evened its league record at 4-4 by virtue of notching its first road victory in league play this season. "I just came out and played hard. I just played like I was back in Philly," said

O'Neil, a highly-regarded freshman who prepped at Lutheran Christian Academy in Philadelphia, Pa. "This past week I have practiced well and I've been pushing myself harder. Coach has been pushing me. I didn't really get tired out there, and I felt good. I felt like I could get to the basket." Blue and Adam Vogelsberg led Middle Tennessee with 12 points each as all nine Blue Raiders who played



entered the scoring column. Rebounding was a strong suit as Middle Tennessee ripped down 47 rebounds - including 16 offensive boards - led by Kyle Young, who equaled his career high with 12 caroms. Morrison finished with nine rebounds and narrowly missed his fourth double double of the season. "This was one of the better wins we have had since I have been here," said Davis, who improved to 7-0 against Florida International as Middle Tennessee's head coach. "That's the best Florida International team we have played. They were physical and they played hard. We were down nine midway through the second half and (Blue and Vogelsberg) each picked up their fourth fouls so we had to do some things with different combinations. We got a great lift from Calvin O'Neil. Tim Blue had 12 (points) and five (rebounds), and I thought Kyle Young battled his tail off. "It was a great win and our first road win in conference play this year. To get down like that and not fold, that was great. Two weeks ago we would not have done that. The whole deal is we finally started getting stop after stop after stop." Middle Tennessee, which trailed 40-36 at the half, saw the deficit stretch to 56-47 with 11:16 remaining; however, that's when the Blue Raider defense stiffened and put together one of its best stretches of the season. Florida International (5-15, 2-6) could not solve Middle Tennessee's zone as the Blue Raiders held the home team scoreless over a 7:54 span. Middle Tennessee's defense limited Florida International to six second-half field goals and a mere 24 percent shooting percentage. The Blue Raiders took full advantage of their sterling defensive play by converting on the offensive end and capped a 13-0 run on freshman point guard Kevin Kanaskie's 3-pointer from the corner to take a 60-56 lead with 3:42 remaining. Young had given Middle Tennessee its first lead since a 2-0 advantage with a free throw just moments before Kanaskie's clutch trey. "That was the play of the game and I give (Cuyler) credit for that," Davis said. "We ran a flat ball screen high and Fats really tried to get to the rim. Kevin's man helped and left him wide open. Fats saw that, made a great pass and Kevin stuck it in for a four-point lead and kind of gave us some separation. There's no question, (O'Neil) was the player of the game, but Kevin's 3-pointer was the play of the game." Florida International would get to within one, 62-61, with 2:33 remaining, but Kanaskie and O'Neil combined to go 4-of-4 from the line in the final 49 seconds to seal the win.

NOTES: Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis earned his 200th career win as a head coach. The total includes three seasons at the junior college level and eight as a Division I head coach. His career mark as a head coach is 200-122 for a 62 percent winning percentage. He is 134-97 as a Division I head coach and 63-47 at Middle Tennessee. "The win for our team in the present is the most important thing," Davis said. "The 200th (win) was nice, and I hope we can have a lot more at Middle Tennessee. You have to credit your staff and the players who have played for you over the years. Hopefully we will continue getting competitive players and (wins) will keep adding up." The Blue Raiders notched their 15th league road win under Kermit Davis and are tied with Louisiana-Lafayette and Arkansas-Little Rock for the most conference wins away from home since the 2002-03 season ... Middle Tennessee collected a season-high 47 rebounds in the win, which are the most since hauling in 47 against Tennessee State, Dec. 5, 2004 ... Kyle Young's 12 rebounds against Florida International tied his career high ... Calvin O'Neil established career highs for points (11), rebounds (6) and minutes (22) in the win ... The Blue Raider bench combined for 36 points and 21 rebounds ... Florida natives Marcus Morrison (St. Petersburg), Fats Cuyler (Leesburg), and Tim Blue (Palm Beach) had more than 60 family and friends in attendance ... Middle Tennessee has won eight straight against Florida International, including seven in succession ... under Davis ... The Blue Raiders improved to 15-7 in February under Davis ... The Blue Raiders improved to 52-2 under Davis when outshooting the opposition.

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/4795>