Volleyball sweeps Denver in conference opener, 3-0

Kozon tallies 14 kills

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DENVER - After earning back-to-back Sun Belt Player of the Week awards, Izabela Kozon starred as Middle Tennessee secured their first conference win of the season at Denver, 3-0 (25-19, 25-21, 25-22). Middle Tennessee (8-4) has now won five consecutive matches, and two straight conference openers. "This was a good win for us," said head coach Matt Peck. "We were playing on the road and at altitude against the West division champion from last year. I'm happy with the performance of the team. We had a great night offensively. We did what we needed to do to win a big match, and we have a couple more big ones tomorrow." Kozon recorded a match-high 14 kills at a .323 clip, and Ashley Adams also reached double figure kills with 12. Stacy Oladinni and Maria Szivos each chipped in eight. Angela Peyton and Morgan Peterson took turns directing the offense with Peyton leading the way with 31 assists. Defensively, Brynne Henderson led the team in digs with 10, and Kendall Howard, a Colorado native, was second on the team with 9. Szivos tallied a match-high five block assists. Each side would battle back and forth in the early goings of the opening stanza, but the Blue Raiders utilized a nice run midway through the set to win 25-19. After Denver took a slim 11-10 lead, Middle Tennessee ran off the next six points to go up 16-11. Later in the set, DU cut the margin to three at 21-18, but the Blue Raiders ran off four of the next five points, culminating with a Szivos kill. MT saw contributions from the whole line-up in the set, outhitting the Pioneers .423 to .107. Kozon, Szivos and Adams would each tally at least five kills in the second frame as Middle Tennessee outhit Denver .417 to .267 to win 25-21. Once again, MT strung together a few runs over the course of the set, which proved to be the final difference. After the Pioneers closed the gap to one at 21-20, the Blue Raiders responded by scoring four of the final five points to go up 2-0 in the match. The final set would prove to the most dramatic, but Middle Tennessee pulled away late to win, 25-22. As had been the case most of the evening, the match was back and forth early, but after taking 11-10 edge, the Blue Raiders would never trail. Denver managed to keep the margin close, cutting the deficit to one on multiple occasions, including at 23-22, but a Kozon kill and service ace sealed the deal. Middle Tennessee will now prepare for two matches on Saturday, facing No. 24 Long Beach State at 2 p.m. and defending Colonial Athletic champion VCU at 6 p.m. Both matches will be played in Denver.

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