Blue Raiders suffer 75-74 heartbreaker at Arkansas State

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JONESBORO, Ark. - All good things must come to an end but it hardly seemed like Middle Tennessee's recent dominance against Arkansas State was going to come to a halt here Thursday night.

The Blue Raiders (13-11, 5-6) led for all but 32 seconds of its Sun Belt Conference road game at Arkansas State, but Dereke Tipler gave the Indians their only lead when it mattered most as he hit the front end of a one-and-one with five seconds remaining to lift them to a 75-74 win in front of 4,427 at the Convocation Center.

The loss ended Middle Tennessee's seven-game winning streak against Arkansas State, all under Blue Raider coach Kermit Davis.

"It was one of those games where I really felt like we were going to win all along because of the way the game was going, I really believed that," Davis said. "But give credit to Arkansas State. They made a lot of tough plays, especially down the stretch, and they kept battling even when it seemed we had things under control. It's a good win for (Arkansas State coach) Dickey Nutt and his team, and it's a tough loss for us."

Adam Vogelsberg led four Blue Raiders in double figures with 17 points on the strength of 5-of-8 from 3-point range, while Kyle Young added 14 points on 7-of-8 shooting from the field. Freshman Theryn Hudson had his best game as a Blue Raider, establishing career highs for points (12) and field goals made (5), and Tim Blue tallied 10.

Middle Tennessee, which led by as many as 18 in the first half, saw Arkansas State tie the game 74-74 on Marcus Ardison's jumper with 32 seconds remaining. The Blue Raiders called a timeout to set up a potential game-winning shot - or take the game to overtime; however, Fats Cuyler's 10-footer was off the mark with 12 seconds remaining and Blue fouled Tipler following the rebound.

"We wanted to take the shot with five or six seconds remaining and either win the game there or take it to overtime but we took the shot too soon," Davis said. "You couldn't ask for a better shot to have a chance to win the game. It was an open 10-footer with the ball in the hands of one of our best shooters but we just took the shot sooner than we had wanted."

The Blue Raiders came out strong and established a 35-17 lead with 6:27 remaining on Hudson's dunk, but the Indians had whittled the lead to six, 41-35, by the half. Middle Tennessee still controlled the game throughout the second half and led 74-66 following two free throws from Kevin Kanaskie with 3:38 remaining; however, it would be the last points the Blue Raiders would score and the Indians continuously made big plays and collected key offensive rebounds with the game hanging in the balance.

"We just couldn't get big stops when we needed them and we gave up too many second shots down the stretch," said Kanaskie, who continued his outstanding play at the point with six assists and no turnovers, while also pulling six rebounds. "We believed we were going to win the game and we felt that way down the stretch but you have to give Arkansas State the credit because they made all the big plays when it mattered. It's a tough loss but we have to put it behind us and regroup."

The Blue Raiders conclude the road trip with their final road game of the season at Arkansas-Little Rock Saturday at 7 p.m.

NOTES: With five 3-pointers against Arkansas State, Adam Vogelsberg moved into a tie for sixth on the single-season list with 62 treys. The junior guard was 5-of-8 from 3-point range and is shooting 56 percent (28-of-50) from beyond the arc during the past seven games ... Freshman point guard Kevin Kanaskie tied his career high for assists (6) and rebounds (6) and tied his career high for minutes played (33) against Arkansas State. In seven games as a starter, Kansaskie's assist/turnover ratio is an eye-popping 5.2-to-1 with 27 assists and five turnovers ... Freshman center Theryn Hudson established career highs for points (12) and field goals made (5) in the setback. Hudson was 5-of-8 from the field ... Junior forward Kyle Young was 7-of-8 from the field and produced 14 points against Arkansas State. He is shooting 65.5 percent from the field, which is currently third on the single-season list at Middle Tennessee ... Middle Tennessee's bench has been averaging 39.5 in its last six games, but the reserves managed just 20 points against Arkansas State with Hudson supplying 12 of them ... The Blue Raiders lost to Arkansas State for the first time in eight games under coach Kermit Davis.

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