Kanaskie helps lead Blue Raiders to eighth win in 10 games

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - It was "Senior Night" as Middle Tennessee honored Fats Cuyler and Marcus Morrison during pregame ceremonies, but it was a freshman who stole the show in the Blue Raiders' 82-58 win against Florida International in front of 3,407 Monday.

- **Photos:** MT vs. FIU Gallery

Freshman point guard Kevin Kanaskie led the Blue Raiders with a career-high 16 points on 5-of-6 shooting from the field, also tying his career high for field goals made, in the win. Kanaskie, who improved to 8-2 as a starter, also had three assists and one turnover. His superlative play was complimented by junior guard Bud Howard, who scored 12 points and pulled six rebounds - all on the offensive boards - while supplying three assists and collecting two steals.

Junior forward Kyle Young tallied 12 points, while Tim Blue and Cuyler finished with nine each as Middle Tennessee concluded the regular season with a 16-11 overall mark, 8-6 in the Sun Belt. The Blue Raiders, who have won eight-of-10, will face Denver in the quarterfinals of the SBC Tournament Sunday at noon at Murphy Center.

"I thought this was a very mature win," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "Our

players came out and played well from the outset and continued the energy into the second half. I was pleased with our approach to the game. I like the way our team is playing. We still have to show improvement, but this is a good way to end the regular season."

The Blue Raiders, who shot 51 percent from the field and 47 percent from 3-point range, jumped out to a 17-4 lead just seven minutes into the game and never looked back. The Golden Panthers (8-19, 4-10) pulled to within nine on three different occasions; however, Middle Tennessee finished the half on a 6-0 run and took a commanding 42-27 into the intermission.

"We put together a very good first half and carried that over into the second," Kanaskie said. "This was an important game for us. It may not have effected our tournament seed or anything, but we wanted to keep the momentum going, keep playing well, send the seniors out with a win on 'Senior Night,' and end the regular season on a positive note. We are getting solid play from a lot of different people and that was the case again tonight."

The Blue Raiders continued to pile on the points in the second half as they finished with 40 and never really let the Golden Panthers back into the game. Middle Tennessee held Florida International to 43 percent from the field and 18 percent from beyond the 3-point arc, while also winning the rebounding battle and forcing 19 Golden Panther turnovers.

POSTGAME NOTES:
SENIORS GO OUT IN STYLE: Middle Tennessee seniors Fats Cuyler and Marcus Morrison were honored in a pregame ceremony as part of "Senior Night." The duo left the court winners in their final Murphy Center regular-season appearance. Managers Trekima Henry and Craig Stephens also were honored. Middle Tennessee improved to 3-1 on "Senior Night" under Kermit Davis, including three straight wins.

STILL PERFECT: Middle Tennessee improved to 8-0 against Florida International under Head Coach Kermit Davis. The Golden Panthers won the first three meetings between the teams as Sun Belt Conference members; however, the Blue Raiders have won nine straight since.

ON A ROLL: The Blue Raiders completed the regular season with a three-game winning streak and have won eight-of-10 entering the Sun Belt Conference Championships. Middle Tennessee will play Denver in quarterfinal action Sunday at noon.

ANOTHER STRONG FEBRUARY: Middle Tennessee ended the month of February with a 6-2 mark by virtue of its win against Florida International. The Blue Raiders are 20-9 for a 69 percent winning percentage in four years under Kermit Davis.

KANASKIE STILL SHINING: Middle Tennessee is 8-2 in freshman point guard Kevin Kanaskie's 10 starts. Kanaskie scored a career-high 16 points against Florida International and tied his career high for field goals made with five. During his 10 games as a starter, Kanaskie has 35 assists and just 11 turnovers for a 3.2-to-1 assist/turnover ratio. Kanaskie was voted the Alexander Automotive Player of the Game by working media.

3-POINT SPECIALISTS: With two 3-pointers against Florida International, junior guard Adam Vogelsberg moved into third on the single-season 3-point goals made list at Middle

Tennessee. Vogelsberg has 67 3-pointers, which are the most in a season since Robert Taylor connected for 77 in 1991. He is also eighth on the single-season 3-point field goal percentage list at 41.6 percent. Fats Cuyler, already sixth on the career 3-point field goals made list, also continued to move up the single-season list. With three treys against Florida Internaitonal, Cuyler has 60 for the season, which is ninth on the single-season list.

STILL ADDING TO MARK: Fats Cuyler and Adam Vogelsberg already are on the top 3-point shooting tandem for a single season in Middle Tennessee history and the duo added to their mark with a combined five 3-pointers Monday. They have combined to hit 127 treys this season, as Vogelsberg has 67 and Cuyler has 60.

YOUNG AMONG BEST: Junior forward Kyle Young was 6-of-9 from the field against Florida International and finished the regular season with a 65.2 percent showing from the field. The mark is third on the single-season list at Middle Tennessee.

BLUE BITS: Middle Tennessee outshot Florida International 50.8 percent to 42.6 percent Monday night, giving the Blue Raiders their 28th consecutive win when outshooting the opponent. The Blue Raiders are 55-2 under Kermit Davis when they shoot better than the opposition ... Middle Tennessee improved to 8-0 this season when scoring 80 or more points and it is 25-1 when scoring 80 or more points under Kermit Davis ... Middle Tennessee's eight Sun Belt Conference wins tie for the second most since it joined the league in 2000-01.

Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Kermit Davis
Opening Statement
"I thought that was a mature win for our team. We were trying to play to get better. Our team has got to continue to get better. We had more guys play well. We had some kind of awkward and silly fouls. Bud Howard is playing really well off the bench, Calvin O'Neil is starting to find his way because he is being more athletic. Kyle Young is being solid by scoring 12 points."

- **On the play of Kevin Kanaskie:** "Kevin has kind of changed our team offensively. He has created an unselfish attitude, and we do have a lot of very unselfish guys. Fats can drive in and score the basket better. Kevin's play has helped our team all around."
- **About the depth of the Middle Tennessee bench:** "Our strengths have been our depth. We have fought injuries. We have everybody headed in the right direction with a positive note." About outscoring Florida International's bench 37 to 8: "You can have an iron man five and that's good, but I really think we have nine starters. Calvin [O' Neil], Tim [Blue], Kyle [Young], and Bud [Howard] play a big part on our team."
- **Thoughts on the upcoming conference tournament:** "I like where we are. We have to keep getting better. We need to work on individual workouts and our skill development this week. We are approaching this like our normal routine and getting ready for this game this weekend."

Freshman guard Kevin Kanaskie
About finishing the season with a win over Florida International: "I think it was a lot on our minds. We have been up and down all year, and this was a huge win to keep us on the right track."

About improving since last playing Florida International:

"I think we have come pretty far since the last time we played them."

About starting the last 10 games for Middle Tennessee:
"Fats is playing better at the two spot, and everybody is playing better. I don't have much to do with how good we are playing."

Thoughts on the Sun Belt Tournament:
"We have great energy. We still need to work and get better on defense and make sure we get our play down before the tournament."

Junior guard Bud Howard
Thoughts on playing the role as clean up guy:
"Coach tells me the more I rebound, the more points I can get. I'm just trying to play with energy and make things happen. I'm happy to be contributing to the success we are having but it's really been a team thing. Everybody is doing their part."

On the play of Middle Tennessee at the close of the regular season:
"I think everybody has come around and are doing a good job lately. Morrison has been crashing the boards. Kyle has been playing better in the post, and Theryn (Hudson) has been strong inside. I think our toughness in practice has helped us out a lot."

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