

March 5, 2006

Blue Raiders suffer quarterfinal heart-breaker against Denver, 58-57

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The breaks did not go Middle Tennessee's way and for the third time in as many years the host institution for the Sun Belt Conference Men's Championships has been eliminated in its first game after the Blue Raiders suffered a 58-57 heart-breaker against Denver in front of 5,105 at the Murphy Center Sunday.

- **Video:** [MT vs. Denver Highlights](#)

Yemi Nicholson's only offensive rebound of the game and layup with 0.8 seconds remaining supplied Denver (15-14) with the game-winner and brought to an end a thrilling basketball game and Middle Tennessee's season. The Blue Raiders complete their campaign with a 16-12 mark.

Middle Tennessee had several opportunities in the final minute of the game; however, they couldn't get a break and the Pioneers capitalized without leaving much time for the Blue Raiders to overcome the last-second heroics. Leading 57-56 with the ball, junior [Adam Vogelsberg](#) turned the ball over with 28 seconds remaining when he made a pass to [Kevin Kanaskie](#), who had broke a different way.

Working for a potential game-winning shot, Denver lost control of the ball in the paint but it went through two Middle Tennessee players and out of bound with four seconds remaining. The Pioneers were trying to get the ball to Nicholson on the inbound play but when they were unable to go to option one, they got the ball to DaShawn Walker, whose shot was blocked by [Marcus Morrison](#).

However, when the ball was blocked it bounced to Nicholson, who put it in the basket with eight-tenths of a second remaining to supply Denver with a 58-57 lead - its first advantage since midway through the first half. Morrison's desperation 3-pointer from halfcourt was off the mark as the buzzer sounded.

"I saw Walker pop free so I jumped to him," Morrison said of the final Denver possession. "I knew he was going to shoot because there were only four seconds left. I just tried to jump as high as I could without fouling him. I turned around and Nicholson was grabbing it and putting it in."

Morrison ended his Blue Raider career with 15 points, his 17th double figure scoring game of the season and 37th of his career, while [Fats Cuyler](#) ended his Middle Tennessee career with 10 points. [Adam Vogelsberg](#), who suffered from a migraine headache and blacked out prior to tipoff, came off the bench and added 11 points. [Bud Howard](#) tacked on seven points and had a career-high 13 rebounds. Nicholson led all scorers with 27 points on 11-of-15 shooting from the field, while Walker added 21 points to give Denver only its second road win of the season against a league opponent. Both came against Middle Tennessee in the Murphy Center.

"Denver likes the Murphy Center. I know that," Middle Tennessee coach Kermit Davis said. "They haven't been very good anywhere else on the road. Their only other road win was at Northern Colorado. They have two road wins in the league and it was against us here. They have shot the ball well here."

Middle Tennessee came out strong and built an 11-3 lead out of the gate but it was unable to sustain the strong start and hit just 3-of-16 shots in the final 11:37 of the half to see a 17-8 advantage turn into a 29-24 halftime deficit. Up to that point, Middle Tennessee had connected on 8-of-16 shots.

The Blue Raiders also started the second half strong and used an 11-1 run to take a 35-30 lead on [Kyle Young](#)'s jumper with 14:19 remaining. Middle Tennessee never led by more than five from that point but they never trailed by more than one as the exciting game continuously hung in the balance.

POSTGAME NOTES:

POUNING THE BOARDS: Middle Tennessee collected 36 rebounds and limited Denver to 27 in the game. The Blue



Senior Marcus Morrison goes up for two of his team-high 15 points against Denver. (Joe Imel, Sun Belt)

Raiders, who were led by [Bud Howard](#)'s career-high 13 rebounds, also had 15 offensive rebounds to Denver's six.

CUYLER MOVES UP: With two 3-pointers against Denver, [Fats Cuyler](#) finished his Blue Raider career and moved into a tie for seventh place on the single-season 3-point field goals made list with 62. He also is sixth on the career 3-point field goals made list with 114.

VOGELSBERG STREAKING: Junior guard [Adam Vogelsberg](#) was 4-of-4 from the free-throw line and ended the season with 26 consecutive makes. He also set the single-season record for free-throw percentage at 90.8 percent (108-of-119). He is the only player in program history to shoot 90 percent or better from the line in a single season.

FIRST TIME: The 58-57 setback marked the first time Middle Tennessee has lost its first game of the Sun Belt Championships under Head Coach Kermit Davis.

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