Volleyball takes down Saint Louis, 3-1

Four Blue Raiders tally double-digit kills

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - After taking home the Sun Belt Tournament title last weekend, the Middle Tennessee volleyball team posted a hard fought 3-1 (25-20, 15-25, 25-23, 25-17) victory over Atlantic-10 foe Saint Louis on Saturday afternoon at Alumni Memorial Gym.

"That was a difficult match for us," head coach Matt Peck said. "Saint Louis is a very good team, and they blocked like crazy today, primarily because they had us out of system and served us tough. It was really nice that we had number of people come in and play different roles today, and we're going to need that in the NCAA Tournament."

The Blue Raiders, who have lost to the Billikens in the weekend following the Sun Belt Tournament in each of the past two seasons, have now won 12 consecutive matches and 26 of their last 27.

Maria Szivos was the primary offensive weapon for Middle Tennessee, tying a career high with a match-high 13 kills and hitting at a remarkable .565 clip. She also tallied a service ace, a block assist and a pair of digs.

"Maria was huge today," Peck said. "She didn't get blocked, she had no unforced hitting errors, and I think she totally took SLU out of rhythm every time she got the ball. We're going to need to see that from her in the postseason. She can be a dominating force at the net offensively and defensively. It was great to see her have a very good match against a very good team."

Three other Blue Raiders posted double digit kills as Lindsay Cheatham, Izabela Kozon, and Stacy

Oladinni all chipped in 10. As a team, MT recorded 54 kills to SLU's 42.

Angela Peyton and Morgan Peterson took turns at setter, notching 29 and 21 assists, respectively.

On the defensive side of the ball, Henderson led the team in digs with 13. Kozon posted 12, earning her 10th double-double of the season and her second in a row. Halie Vannoy was third on the team in the category with nine.

At the net, Middle Tennessee was in unfamiliar territory as the Billikens out-blocked the Blue Raiders 16.0 to 7.0. Oladinni held the team high with four block assists and Kozon was second with three.

Middle Tennessee outhit Saint Louis .321 to .080 in a 25-20 opening set victory. Szivos had five kills in just six attempts to lead the effort for MT.

After swapping points in the early goings, Ashley Adams posted three straight kills to give the Blue Raiders a 6-3 edge that they wouldn't relinquish. Saint Louis would cut the deficit to two at 15-13, but three kills from Szivos and a kill from Cheatham over the next five serves ended the threat.

The Blue Raiders were outhit .360 to .029 in the second frame, and the Billikens evened up the match with a 25-15 win.

Middle Tennessee weathered a late comeback bid to take home the third set in nail-biting fashion, 25-23. Both Cheatham and Szivos recorded four kills and the Blue Raiders never trailed.

MT came out of the break on fire, running up an early 8-2 advantage. For much of the frame, the Billikens couldn't bring the margin within four, but a ferocious late comeback from SLU would put the result in doubt. Back-to-back Billiken attack errors gave the Blue Raiders set point at 24-18. However, Saint Louis ran off five consecutive points to force a Middle Tennessee timeout at 24-23. Adams would silence the rally with a kill to hand the Blue Raiders a 2-1 match lead.

After some back-and-forth play early, Middle Tennessee cruised to a 25-17 fourth set victory. Kozon caught fire with four kills in the frame, and Szivos added three. The Blue Raiders as a team tallied 14 kills with only two attack errors and three blocks in the set.

After Saint Louis took a slim 8-7 edge, Middle Tennessee ran off six of the next seven points to go up 13-9, and the Blue Raiders would stretch out the lead moments later with four consecutive scores to take a commanding 18-11 advantage, ultimately handing MT their third consecutive four-set victory.

Middle Tennessee will now plan for postseason play next weekend. The Blue Raiders, who will be playing in their fifth consecutive NCAA Tournament, will learn of their fate tomorrow afternoon on the NCAA Selection Show Special, scheduled for 2 p.m. on ESPNews. Fans are invited to attend a selection party hosted by MT at The Boulevard Bar & Grille, which is located on the corner of Middle Tennessee Blvd. and Main St. in Murfreesboro.

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