Blue Raiders slay Hilltoppers 69-60 to extend win streak

Team has won six of last seven games

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee used an all-around second half performance to guide it against rival Western Kentucky Thursday night for a 69-60 win and extending its win streak four games. The Blue Raiders (13-12, 8-4) shot 47.8 percent in the second half after struggling from the field in the first half. Middle Tennessee also had 17 rebounds and nine steals on the defensive end in the second half. Senior James Washington scored a team high 24 points while sophomore James Gallman also added to the scoring with 10 points. "I thought Western Kentucky competed really, really hard. We just couldn't do anything with them on the glass, which was our biggest emphasis going in. I thought in the second half our zone defense was really active and we got our hands on a lot of balls," head coach Kermit Davis said. "We got into transition and when we got into offensive transition our team was better. It is a really good win for our team against a team, who I think was playing as well as anyone in our league coming in." With the win over the Hilltoppers, Davis recorded the 150th win of his career at Middle Tennessee. Davis is now 150-122 during his nine-year tenure with the program. The win also gave Middle Tennessee another milestone as it was the first time since the 1929-30 season that the Blue Raiders have won three straight over their arch rival. Middle Tennessee has now won six of its last seven games. Middle Tennessee held the Hilltoppers to just 32. 7 percent from the field in the game but they outrebounded the Blue Raiders 46-33. Middle Tennessee trailed 8-3 but a layup by Charles and free throws by Washington made it a one-point

game, 8-7, with 12:15 to play. Charles, on a heads up pass by Gallman from the floor, dunked the ball to give the Blue Raiders their first lead, 9-8 10:35. The Hilltoppers pulled ahead 27-20 but Middle Tennessee used a 9-1 run in the final three minutes to take a 29-28 lead at the break. Western Kentucky dominated the boards grabbing 25 including 10 on the offensive side of the ball. Middle Tennessee had 16 rebounds in the first half with just five on the offensive end. Also on defense, each team had four blocks but the Blue Raiders had three steals to none for the Hilltoppers. Neither team posted a high shooting percentage with the Blue Raiders shooting 29.6 percent. Washington made three treys and four free throws to record a team high 13 points at the break. The Blue Raiders came out strong to begin the second half taking a seven-point lead, 35-28, after two three-pointers by Gallman. The Blue Raiders held Western Kentucky scoreless for a little over 10 minutes between the end of the first half and beginning of the second half as it built its lead to 11-points, 41-30, with 14:38 remaining in the game. At the eight-minute media timeout, Middle Tennessee had outscored the Hilltoppers 21-8 to take and keep a 14-point lead, 50-36. Western Kentucky cut the lead down to six with as little as 1:37 to play but the Blue Raiders held on. Middle Tennessee returns to Murphy Center for the weekend with a Saturday matchup against FIU. The game with the Panthers is set for 4:30 p.m. on the front end of a doubleheader with the women's team. It will also be the Learning Circle Honor Roll Day with area school children receiving free admission with a voucher. The Sun Belt Championships will be held in Hot Springs, Ark., March 4-8. Tickets for all sessions are $83 and on sale through the Blue Raider Ticket Office by contacting 1-888-YES-MTSU or by visiting goblueraiders.com.

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