Late rally falls short as Blue Raiders fall to Houston Baptist

Washington leads all scorers with 21 points

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HOUSTON, Texas - Middle Tennessee let a nine-point second half lead slip away and while it battled could not overcome poor shooting and fouls as it fell by two, 70-68, to Houston Baptist at Sharp Gymnasium on Tuesday night. The Huskies went on a 10-4 run capped by a three-point play by Andrew Gonzalez which gave HBU a seven-point, 58-51; lead with less than five minutes remaining in the game. Middle Tennessee continued to fight and cut the lead to three, 64-61 with 2:10 on the clock. Then HBU's Shawn Echols made a jumper with 31 seconds to play extending the lead to 67-62. A quick jumper by senior James Washington cut the Huskies' lead back to three, 67-64, with 29 seconds to play. The two traded free throws with HBU coming out on top by four, 70-66, after Michael Moss made both of his attempts with 11 seconds left in the game. Then Washington made two free throws of his own cutting the lead back to two, 70-68, with 5.9 seconds on the clock. Sophomore James Gallman stole the ball on an inbounds pass and put up a trey with three seconds on the clock but missed and time ran out on the late rally. The Blue Raiders (14-15) shot 36.4 percent from the field as a team with Washington leading all scorers with 21 points. Washington made four field goals and 13 free throws in the game which included the final seven points for Middle Tennessee. R-sophomore Jason Jones and sophomore JT Sulton aided the Blue Raider offense with 13 points each. J. Jones also grabbed a team high eight rebounds for the Blue Raiders. Sulton ended the

game with six rebounds, a steal and blocked a shot to also add assistance to the defense. Middle Tennessee committed 30 fouls with one player fouling out and three others recording four each. HBU (4-22) went to the free throw line 35 times including 11 times in the final three minutes of the game. "It's disappointing. We just didn't have anybody make layups, and we bobbled balls," head coach Kermit Davis said. "Our staff takes full responsibility, but they were just better than us. It just shows you the margin of error for our team when we don't follow through with the game plan." Houston Baptist shot 42 percent as a team with Gonzalez leading them in the win. Gonzalez ended the game with 36 points after making 11 field goals and 13 free throws. The Huskies also outrebounded Middle Tennessee 36-35 with Moss leading the way with eight. After trailing 10-6, Middle Tennessee outscored the Huskies 11-5, capped by a three-point play by Charles, to take a 17-15 lead with 9:39 on the clock. Middle Tennessee extended that run 20-7 for a nine-point lead, 26-17. Houston Baptist battled back cutting the Middle Tennessee lead to three-points, 28-25, with 1:52 remaining in the half. The Blue Raiders held on using a 6-2 run to take a 32-27 lead at the break. The Blue Raiders shot 42 percent from the field in the first half led by Washington with 10 points. Washington connected on all six free throw opportunities as the team made all nine of its attempts. Middle Tennessee held HBU to 31 percent from the field and pulled down 21 rebounds. J. Jones led the defense with four rebounds while four different players recorded one block each. The two teams traded points with the Blue Raiders staying on top with the lead. Then HBU used a 7-1 run to cut the lead to Middle Tennessee lead to one, 45-44, with 10:37 on the clock. Then a three-point play by Moss tied the game at 47 with 9:23 to play. Middle Tennessee wraps up the regular season slate on Saturday, Feb. 26 when it plays host to rival Western Kentucky at 7 p.m. in Murphy Center. Chip Walters along with Kyle Turnham will have the call on the Blue Raider Network and out of town fans can also catch the action on Fox College Sports. Fans are encouraged to wear their blue to the game against the Hilltoppers and get to the "Glass House" early as Middle Tennessee will honor its seniors in a pregame ceremony. Blue Raider fans are invited to attend Kermit Davis Live! Wednesday night at Coach's Grill in Murfreesboro. Chip Walters, the voice of the Blue Raiders, hosts the show which airs from 7-8 p .m. on WGNS (100.5. FM, 101 .9 FM, 1450 AM), WMOT (89 .5) and WNSR (560 AM). Fans have the opportunity to ask questions by calling into the show at 1-866-RAIDERS, emailing radio@goblueraiders.com or submitting a question if they are in attendance. 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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