Middle Tennessee knocks off Western Kentucky, 3-1

Wistrick's 19 kills help hand WKU first loss in 15 matches

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - The Western Kentucky volleyball team entered Tuesday's match on a 14-match winning streak, but that didn't seem to matter for Middle Tennessee after the Blue Raiders took hold for a 3-1 (24-26, 25-19, 25-22, 25-16) victory at E.A. Diddle Arena in Bowling Green, Ky. "I think our team came into tonight realizing that this was a must-win for us," head coach Matt Peck said. "In order for us to make the NCAA Tournament again this year, these are the kinds of matches that we need to win. Taking on Western Kentucky is a huge opportunity for us, and I think we played really well tonight. I'm really happy to come out of here with a 3-1 win." The victory marked the fourth consecutive for the Blue Raiders and moved Middle Tennessee into first place in the Sun Belt's East Division. It was also the seventh straight win for the Blue and White over their arch-rivals. Alyssa Wistrick put together an outstanding performance, tallying a career-best and match-high 19 kills at a .289 rate, and Maria Szivos hit .323 with 14 kills. Ashley Adams was third on the team with 10, and Oyinlola Oladinni added nine. "I think I could've done better," Wistrick said. "They're our rivals, so we always want to do well when we play them. I feel that I could have hit better, but It's great to get a career-high against them. We still have work to do though." As a team the Blue Raiders had 56 kills to WKU's 50 and out-hit the Hilltoppers .289 to .179. Morgan Peterson led the team in assists with 36, and Angela Peyton chipped in 12. Defensively, Howard had a career-high 17 digs, and Brynne Henderson also reached double digits with 11. At the net, both Szivos and Cheatham posted four block assists, and Adams had two to go along with a pair of solo blocks. The Blue Raiders dropped the first set in a 26-24 nail-biter despite getting out-hit .257 to .150. After Howard led off with the first of two service aces on the night, the Hilltoppers controlled play early en route to grabbing a 17-14 lead. However, Middle Tennessee mounted their response, taking just their second lead of the set at 18-17 and punctuating a four-point

run with a Cheatham kill. The two teams would tie three times down the stretch, and a Wistrick kill gave the Blue Raiders an opportunity for set point. WKU answered decisively, recording the final three points to go up in the match 1-0. Wistrick and Adams combined for nine kills in the second set as Middle Tennessee hit .524 en route to a 25-19 victory. The two teams would tie on eight occasions before Szivos tallied a kill and assisted on a block to put MT up 17-15. Lindsey Purvis would cap a four-point run moments later with a service ace, putting the frame out of reach for the Hilltoppers and evening things up at 1-1. It was another close affair in set three as Middle Tennessee withstood a handful of strong challenges from Western Kentucky en route to a 25-22 win. After running out to a 5-1 lead thanks to a pair of Wistrick kills, WKU came out of a timeout on fire, grabbing a 10-8 advantage. The two sides would go back and fourth for much of the frame, but a key Hilltopper service error tied it up at 20-20, and both Szivos and Wistrick helped close out the set with four of the ensuing six points. The Blue Raiders put it all together in the fourth, out-hitting Western Kentucky .364 to .057 in a 25-16 runaway. Purvis held serve on a key early set run, forcing a pair of WKU timeouts as the Blue and White raced out to an 8-2 lead and wouldn't look back. Szivos, Oladinni and Adams combined for 13 kills in the frame, handing MT the 3-1 decision. Middle Tennessee will now look to build from Tuesday's win with a pair of home contests on Friday and Saturday against South Alabama and Troy.

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