Blue Raiders sweep past UALR in Sun Belt Tournament

Middle Tennessee will play North Texas Friday

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MIAMI - Behind double-digit kills from both Alyssa Wistrick and Ashley Adams, the Middle Tennessee volleyball team defeated UALR 3-0 (25-22, 25-23, 25-23) in the first round of the Sun Belt Tournament at U.S. Century Bank Arena in Miami. Wistrick led the Blue Raiders with 12 kills and Adams was right behind her with 11. Maria Szivos added eight, and Cheatham hit at a .636 rate en route to recording seven. As a team Middle Tennessee had 47 kills to UALR's 38 and out-hit the Trojans .234 to .184. Morgan Peterson was responsible for directing the offense for much of the night, posting a match-high 38 assists. Oyinlola Oladinni led the defense at the net with six blocks, and both Cheatham and Szivos added four. Brynne Henderson led all Blue Raiders with 13 digs, and Szivos also reached double figures with 11. The Blue and White started things off strong as Adams posted six kills in the opening set, helping Middle Tennessee out-hit the Trojans .405 to .286 on the way to a 25-22 victory. After tying six times in the early goings, it appeared as if the Blue Raiders grabbed some breathing room at 15-12, but the Trojans put together a 7-2 run to take the lead at 19-17. Adams picked up three kills over the course of a five-point MT swing, helping the Blue Raiders grab the advantage for good at 22-19. It was another close affair in the second frame, as the Blue Raiders held on late to win 25-23. After utilizing a 6-0 run to take the 8-5 lead, UALR answered with a 5-1 spurt of their own to go up 10-9. Each side would trade sideouts until Middle Tennessee put together a 4-0 run highlighted by a back-to-back kill and block by Wistrick. The Blue Raider couldn't shake the Trojans, who responded with another 5-1 run to grab the 19-18 lead. Cheatham came up big down the stretch with three kills and a block to send MT into the break with a 2-0 advantage. The third set featured 14 ties, but led by five kills from Wistrick, Middle Tennessee took home the 25-23 win. After Middle Tennessee ran out to an early 7-4 lead, UALR scored five of the ensuing six points to grab a slim 9-8 lead. Neither side could mount much of

a run, but Cheatham sparked a three point run with a kill and a block to put MT up 19-17 late. However, the Trojans followed up with three consecutive points of their own to go up 20-19. After a Lindsey Purvis service ace gave the Blue Raiders the 21-20 lead moments later, a 3-1 swing for UALR put MT in dangerous territory, down 23-22 late. Wistrick and Szivos answered the call with a pair of kills, and a Trojan attack error ended the match, sending Middle Tennessee into the Sun Belt semifinals for the seventh consecutive season. Middle Tennessee will now get ready to take on North Texas on Friday at 4 p.m. at U.S. Century Bank Arena in Miami.

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