Blue Raiders hit season-high .319 in 3-1 win over Florida Atlantic

Katie Bange tallies career-high 15 kills, hits .560

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team had three players tally double-figure kills Friday night as it beat the Florida Atlantic Owls 3-1 (25-21, 25-19, 17-25, 25-22) at Alumni Memorial Gym.

Chelsea Ross led all players with 17 kills and added nine digs. Katie Bange had a career-high 15 kills and nine digs, hitting a match-high .560 for the match. Senior Brandi Waller added 13 kills and two blocks.

Middle Tennessee (6-17, 3-4 Sun Belt) got off to a fast start against Florida Atlantic (6-12, 1-6). The Blue Raiders won five of the first six points of the first set, highlighted by a block by Waller and Tyler Richardson. The Owls closed to within three points at 10-7 on a Sara Stoll kill, but a Bange kill and a block by Bange and Rachel Shaughnessy put Middle Tennessee back up by five, 12-7. The Blue Raiders held a comfortable lead up to 22-18 when an Alessia Pizzocheri kill sparked a three-point Florida Atlantic run that made the score 22-21. Waller ended the spurt with a kill and Ross put down consecutive kills to give Middle Tennessee the first set 25-21. The Blue Raiders hit .400 in the opening frame to the Owls .088.

The Blue Raiders once again jumped out to a five-point advantage early in the second set, as a Richardson kill put Middle Tennessee in front 8-3. The lead grew to six at 12-6 on a Shaughnessy kill. The Blue Raiders hit .406 in the second set with Florida Atlantic only getting as close as four for the rest of the set. Middle Tennessee had 16 kills in the second set with only three errors. The Blue Raiders won the set 25-19 and took a two sets to none lead in the match.

Florida Atlantic opened the third set on an 8-2 run, highlighted by back-to-back blocks by Stoll and Thacilli Pereira. Middle Tennessee used a Shaughnessy kill and a pair of Owls errors to get within three points at 8-5. Florida Atlantic led 13-8 when a Waller kill started a four-point Blue Raiders run that got the home team within one at 13-12. Pizzocheri ended the Middle Tennessee run with a kill and started a six-point Owls run that made the score 19-12. The Blue Raiders got to within five

points of Florida Atlantic at 20-15 on a Shelby Anderton kill, but the Owls' hitting proved to be too much. Florida Atlantic hit .321 to Middle Tennessee's .167 and won the set 25-17 on a Darija Sataric kill.

The Owls rode the momentum of the win in the third set into the fourth, taking an early 5-2 lead on a Pereira kill. Middle Tennessee came back and tied the set at 9-9 on a block by Anderton and Monet Marshall, then took a 10-9 lead on a Florida Atlantic error. The two teams then traded points up to 15-14 when the Owls won three straight points to take a 17-15 lead. The Blue Raiders leveled the set at 17-17 after kills by Waller and Ross. Middle Tennessee took back the lead at 21-20 on a Ross kill, but Florida Atlantic tied the score at 21-21 on a Stoll kill. With the score tied 22-22, Florida Atlantic committed miscues on consecutive points to give Middle Tennessee match point at 24-22. The Blue Raiders put the match away with a block by Waller and Richardson, giving Middle Tennessee the set 25-22 and the match 3-1.

The Blue Raiders hit .319 for the match, a season-high for Middle Tennessee. Florida Atlantic only managed a .192 hitting percentage. Middle Tennessee held a 38-33 advantage in digs as the Owls had five blocks to the Blue Raiders' four. Pizzocheri led Florida Atlantic with 15 kills as libero Cintia Nightingale led all players with 12 digs.

Middle Tennessee returns to Alumni Memorial Gym Saturday night with a 7 p.m. match against FIU.

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