Blue Raiders drop five-set heartbreaker to UALR

Volleyball moves to 4-5 in Sun Belt play

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team led the UALR Trojans two sets to one Friday night at Alumni Memorial Gym, but could not put them away. UALR came back to win the match 3-2 (23-25, 25-21, 24-26, 25-17, 15-12) and move the Blue Raiders to 4-5 in the Sun Belt.

Friday night's match featured the Sun Belt's leaders in kills per set in UALR's Edina Begic and MT's Chelsea Ross. Begic, who also leads the nation in kills per set, had 26 kills, 15 digs, and five blocks in the match. Ross, second in the conference in kills, also had 26 kills and 15 digs. Freshman opposite Katie Bange had 14 kills in the match. Shelby Anderton set a new career-high with 62 assists as Tyler Richardson led all players in the match with eight blocks.

Middle Tennessee (7-19, 4-5 Sun Belt) jumped out to a 6-3 lead in the opening set on a block by Richardson and Ross as well as a Bri McCombs ace. UALR (10-11, 6-3) came back and took a 7-6 lead on a Begic kill before the Blue Raiders tied the set at 7-7 on a Monet Marshall kill. The Trojans took back the lead on a Middle Tennessee error, and grew the advantage to three at 11-8 on a Daniele Souza Moura kill.

The Blue Raiders trailed 14-12 before a Bange kill sparked a quick three-point run that put Middle Tennessee ahead 15-14. UALR came back to win five of the next six points to take a 19-16 lead. The Blue Raiders responded with a 6-1 run of their own, as a Ross kill put Middle Tennessee in front 22-20. The Trojans were not deterred, coming back to tie the set 23-23 on a Begic kill. After a UALR error gave Middle Tennessee set point at 24-23, McCombs served her second ace of the set to give the Blue Raiders the opening set 25-23.

Middle Tennessee once again took a quick lead to start the second set. A Bange kill put the Blue

Raiders in front 5-3, but the Trojans took advantage of some Middle Tennessee errors to tie the set 6-6. The Blue Raiders got a kill from Anderton to break the tie, then won three of the next four points to take a 10-7 lead. Middle Tennessee led 12-9 when a Begic kill started a three-point run that tied the set 12-12. The two teams traded points up to 16-15. UALR tied the set on a Marleen de Zoete kill and took the next six points to take a 22-16 lead. The Blue Raiders cut the lead in half at 23-20 after back-to-back blocks by Richardson and Ross. Begic gave UALR set point at 24-20 with a kill and the set 25-21 on another kill.

UALR got out to a 5-2 lead to start the third set, capped off by an Adisa Hodzic kill. The Blue Raiders came back to tie the set 6-6 on a Marshall solo block and an ace by McCombs. Middle Tennessee took the lead at 8-7 and led 11-9 before the Trojans tied the set 11-11 on a Begic kill. The two teams traded points up to 15-15. Richardson broke the tie with the kill, and Middle Tennessee took a 19-15 lead on McCombs' third ace of the match. UALR battled back to tie the set 23-23 on a Blue Raiders error, then earned a set point at 24-23 on a block by Hodzic and Begic. Middle Tennessee tied the set at 24-24 as Bange and Richardson blocked a Begic attack. The Blue Raiders won the third set 26-24 as Bange and Richardson blocked two more Begic attacks in succession, giving Middle Tennessee a 2-1 lead.

The fourth set started out close with the two teams playing to a 7-7 tie. Souza Moura put UAL R in front 8-7 with a kill, then grew its lead to 13-10 on a Begic kill. Middle Tennessee closed the gap to two at 14-12 on a Brandi Waller kill, but that was as close as the Blue Raiders would get. The Trojans took an 18-13 lead on an Eva Xie solo block. Ross then put down three straight kills to get Middle Tennessee back within two, 18-16. UALR then ran off six straight points to take a 24-16 lead. The Trojans hit .300 in the fourth set to the Blue Raiders' .114 and won the set 25-17, tying the match at two sets apiece.

The fifth set was a back-and-forth affair. The Blue Raiders took a 3-2 lead after two straight Bange kills. UALR took a 4-3 lead before Bange tied the set 4-4 with another kill. With the set tied 5-5, the Trojans got a kill from Hodzic and a Blue Raiders error to take a 7-5 lead. Middle Tennessee tied the set 7-7 on a block by Ross and Richardson. The Blue Raiders took the lead at 11-10 as a Ross kill punctuated a three-point run. UALR tied the set 11-11 on a Begic kill. The two teams then traded points to get the score to 12-12. UALR took a 13-12 lead on a Begic kill, then earned match point at 14-12. The Trojans got a block on match point from Hodzic and Begic to win the set 15-12 and the match 3-2.

UALR hit .241 for the match to Middle Tennessee's .159. The Trojans also held a 65-63 edge in digs, but the Blue Raiders had a 13.5-11 advantage in blocks. Hodzic added 13 kills and seven blocks for UALR, hitting .440 for the match. Marleen de Zoete had a double-double of 51 assists and 12 digs.

Middle Tennessee plays its home finale Saturday night at 7 p.m. against Arkansas State for Senior Night. Prior to the match, the Blue Raiders will honor the two seniors on the 2012 squad, Brandi Waller and Halie Vannoy.

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