Volleyball falls in four sets to Arkansas State in home finale

Seniors Brandi Waller and Halie Vannoy play final match at Alumni Memorial Gym

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team lost its final home match of the season at Alumni Memorial Gym Saturday night 3-1 (25-20, 20-25, 24-26, 21-25) to the Arkansas State Red Wolves.

Prior to the match, the Blue Raiders honored seniors Brandi Waller and Halie Vannoy for senior night. Waller had 14 kills and three blocks in the match as Vannoy had three digs and tied a career-high with three service aces. Chelsea Ross led Middle Tennessee with 15 kills, as Katie Bange added 14 kills and hit .414.

Middle Tennessee (7-20, 4-6 Sun Belt) took control of the first set early, taking a 10-7 lead on a Monet Marshall solo block. The Blue Raiders' lead grew to four points at 13-10 as Ross and Tyler Richardson blocked a Kelsie Hodges attack. Arkansas State (16-10, 6-4) then went on a four-point run to tie the set 14-14, getting two kills from Jasmine Terry in the process. The two sides then traded points up to 17-17 when back-to-back kills by Ross and Bange gave the Bleu Raiders' a 19-17 lead. The Red Wolves closed to within one at 20-19 on a Kelsey Sullivan kill. Waller then put down a kill that sparked a four-pont Middle Tennessee run that gave the Blue Raiders' set point at 24-19. Arkansas State fought off one set point, but a service error would give the Blue Raiders the opening set 25-20.

The Red Wolves jumped out to a 7-3 lead in the second set, getting a block by Sullivan and Marie Hadar as well as an ace from Megan Baska. Middle Tennessee then won eight of the next 11 points as consecutive Waller kills put the Blue Raiders in front 11-10. The Blue Raiders extended the lead to three at 15-12 with a three-point run that included a Waller solo block and Vannoy ace. Middle Tennessee led 16-14 when a Hodges kill kickstarted a 6-1 Arkansas State run that included a triple block by Hodges, Terry, and Allison Kearney to give the Red Wolves a 20-17 lead. Arkansas State then won the set 25-20, hitting .300 in the frame to tie the match at one set apiece.

The two teams traded points early and often in the third set, playing to an 8-8 tie. Marshall broke that tie with a kill, starting a four-point run that put Middle Tennessee in the lead 12-8. The advantage grew to four at 19-15 on a Ross kill. Arkansas State closed the gap to one at 19-18 on a Sullivan solo block. The Blue Raiders got the lead back up to three at 21-18 on a Bange kill and Waller block. Middle Tennessee led 22-20 when the Red Wolves won three straight points to take a 23-22 lead. The two teams then traded points to tie the set at 24-24. Hodges broke the tie with a kill to give Arkansas State set point. The Red Wolves then took the set 26-24 on a Kearney kill, taking a 2-1 lead in the match.

The Red Wolves took a quick 5-1 lead in the fourth set, getting kills from Terry and Hadar. Middle Tennessee then won four of the next five points, getting to within one at 6-5 on a Waller kill. The Blue Raiders trailed 8-6 when a Ross kill started a four-point Middle Tennessee run that put the home team in front 10-8. The Red Wolves got within one at 12-11 before three kills from Ross and Bange gave Middle Tennessee a 15-11 advantage. The Blue Raiders led 19-15 before a Taylor Szypulski kill sparked an 8-0 Arkansas State run that put the Red Wolves in the lead 23-19. Hodges had three kills in the spurt and was also in on a block. Waller put down a kill to end the Arkansas State run, getting the Blue Raiders back within three at 23-20. Hodges gave the Red Wolves a match point at 24-20, and put down a kill to win the set 25-21 for Arkansas State and the match 3-1.

Middle Tennessee hit only .199 for the match as Arkansas State hit .294. The Blue Raiders held a 12-8.5 advantage in blocks as the Red Wolves outdug Middle Tennessee 54-45. Sullivan led all players with 17 kills as Hodges added 12. Kearney had 52 assists.

The Blue Raiders take to the road for their final five conference matches of the season, beginning Friday with a 5:30 p.m. match at Florida Atlantic.

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