Volleyball drops Sun Belt finale at No. 18 WKU 3-0

Blue Raiders finish conference play 7-8

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team could not overcome the high-powered offense of the No. 18 WKU Lady Toppers Friday night, losing 3-0 (14-25, 12-25, 25-27) at E.A. Diddle Arena. The Blue Raiders finish conference play 7-8.

Middle Tennessee's result, combined with other results Friday night, guarantees that the Blue Raiders will be the No. 6 seed in the Sun Belt Championships that begin next Thursday at Diddle Arena. Chelsea Ross led the Blue Raiders with 11 kills. Brandi Waller and Tyler Richardson each had eight kills. Richardson hit .500 for the match and had four blocks.

WKU (29-3, 15-0 Sun Belt) opened the first set by taking a 9-5 lead on two Noelle Langenkamp kills and blocks by Paige Wessel, Heather Boyan, and Jordyn Skinner. Middle Tennessee (10-22, 7-8) got within two at 11-9 on kills by Waller and Richardson. The Lady Toppers pulled away with a 9-1 run that started with back-to-back Wessel kills, putting WKU in front 20-10. Haley Bodway had two kills and a block during the run as well. The Blue Raiders only got as close as eight points the rest of the way, as a Noelle Langenkamp solo block gave WKU a 25-14 win in the opening set.

The two sides traded points to open the second set, with a Katie Bange kill getting Middle Tennessee within one at 5-4. WKU then won five olf the next six points as a Sarah Rogers ace put the Lady Toppers ahead 10-5. After a Richardson kill made the score 10-6, Skinner put down consecutive kills as WKU went on a 6-0 run to go ahead 16-6. The Blue Raiders hit just .050 in the second set, as WKU took the second set 25-12 on a Janee' Diggins kill. The Lady Toppers hit .467 in the second after hitting .500 in the opening set.

WKU took an 8-4 lead to start the third set on kills by Wessel, Boyan, and Skinner. Middle Tennessee closed to within one as back-to-back blocks by Waller and Richardson made the score 10-9. The Blue Raiders tied the set 11-11 on a block by Richardson and Shelby Anderton. The Lady Toppers took back the lead with a Wessel kill, then extended the lead to four at 17-13 on a block by

Boyan and Melanie Stutsman.

Middle Tennessee rallied with a 5-1 run, capped off by a Richardson kill, to level the set 18-18. The Blue Raiders took their first lead of the set at 21-20 after a block by Ross and Richardson. WKU broke a 22-22 tie with kills by Bodway and Boyan to earn match point at 24-22. Middle Tennessee fought off two set points on a block by Anderton and Monet Marshall and an Anderton ace. With the set tied 24-24, Marshall put down a kill to give the Blue Raiders set point at 25-24. The Lady Toppers fought off that set point to tie the set 25-25, then got a block and an ace to win the set 27-25 and the match 3-0.

The Blue Raiders hit .129 for the match, hitting .229 in the final set. WKU hit .391 for the match and outblocked Middle Tennessee 10-7. Boyan led the Lady Toppers with 10 kills, with Wessel adding nine. Stutsman led the match with 36 assists.

The Blue Raiders now wait to see who their opponent in next week's Sun Belt Championships will be. Conference play wraps up Sunday afternoon.

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