Volleyball falls 3-1 to North Texas at Sun Belt Championship

First loss in quarterfinals for Blue Raiders since 2004

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - The Middle Tennessee volleyball team was three points away from a deciding fifth set Thursday in the opening round of the 2012 Sun Belt Conference Volleyball Championship, but could not overcome the third-seeded North Texas Mean Green. The Blue Raiders lost 3-1 (21-25, 23-25, 25-23, 22-25) at E.A. Diddle Arena, their first loss in the opening round of the conference tournament since 2004.

Brandi Waller led Middle Tennessee with 17 kills, hitting .250 for the match. Chelsea Ross added 12 kills, nine digs, and three blocks. Tyler Richardson had 10 kills and four blocks. Monet Marshall and Katie Bange each had a team-high five blocks. Bri McCombs added 16 digs.

North Texas (24-11) took control of the opening set early, taking the first three points on a Courtney Windham kill and back-to-back aces by Katie Dudding. Middle Tennessee (10-23) closed to within one at 4-3 on the strength of a pair of Waller kills. The Mean Green took four of the next five points to extend their lead to four points, as a Kaci Eaton kill made the score 8-4. The Blue Raiders were within three at 9-6 when a May Allen kill started a five-point North Texas run that gave the Mean Green a 14-6 lead.

Middle Tennessee responded with a quick 3-0 run, making the score 14-9 on Waller's fourth kill of the set. North Texas extended its lead to seven at 19-12 on a block by Hanna Forst and Karissa Flack. The Blue Raiders then charged back into the set. Middle Tennessee went on a 7-2 run highlighted by two blocks and a Shelby Anderton ace to make the score 21-19. After a Windham kill, Waller and Ross put down consecutive strikes to get Middle Tennessee within one, 22-21. That would be as close as the Blue Raiders would get. The Mean Green won the next three points to win the first set 25-21.

The Mean Green kept rolling going into the second set, using a seven-point run to take an 8-2 lead. Kills by Ross and Richardson got the Blue Raiders within two at 8-6. North Texas then got kills from

Flack, Forst, and Carnae Dillard to extend the Mean Green's lead to four 12-8. The Mean Green led 16-10 when a Waller kill started a 6-1 run that got Middle Tennessee within one, 17-16. The Blue Raiders fought off a pair of North Texas charges to tie the set 22-22 on a block by Marshall and Katie Bange. The Mean Green took a 23-22 lead on a Dillard kill, and won the set 25-23 to take a 2-0 lead in the match.

The two sides traded points early in the third set, with Middle Tennessee taking a 6-5 lead on a McCombs ace. North Texas came back with kills from Dillard and Flack to take an 8-6 advantage. The Blue Raiders then went on a 5-1 run capped off by a Bange kill to take a 12-9 lead and force a Mean Green timeout. The lead grew to five at 15-10 on an Anderton kill and Marshall ace. Middle Tennessee led 17-12 when Dillard kill kickstarted a 5-1 run that got North Texas back within one point, 18-17.

The Mean Green tied the set at 21-21 on a kill by Eaton. Middle Tennessee broke the tie with a block by Bange and Marshall, and took a 23-21 lead on Bange's sixth kill of the set. Once again, the Mean Green tied the set as kills by Windham and Dillard made the score 23-23. Waller gave the Blue Raiders set point with a kill, and Middle Tennessee took advantage as Waller and Richardson blocked a Mean Green attack to give the Blue Raiders the third set 25-23.

Middle Tennessee rode the momentum of the third set win into the fourth, taking a 6-3 lead on a Richardson kill. The Blue Raiders' advantage grew to four points at 9-5 after kills by Bange and Marshall. Middle Tennessee led 12-9 when North Texas got a Flack kill to start a 5-0 run, putting the Mean Green in the lead 14-12. The Blue Raiders got the lead back at 15-14, getting a Ross kill and solo block in a three point span. The two teams then traded points, playing to a 19-19 tie. Middle Tennessee broke the tie on a North Texas error at 20-19, but a Dillard kill and a block put the Mean Green ahead 21-20. North Texas led 23-21 when a Richardson kill got the Blue Raiders within one, 23-22. Flack put down a kill to give North Texas match point at 24-22, with the Mean Green taking the fourth set 25-22 and the match 3-1.

The Blue Raiders hit .203 for the match and outblocked North Texas 10-9. The Mean Green hit .236 for the match. Each team had 49 digs. Dillard led all players with 22 kills with Windham adding 13. Flack had a match-high six blocks while hitting .417.

Middle Tennessee wraps up the 2012 season on Friday, November 23 with a 6 p.m. match at Lipscomb.

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