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Blue Raiders fall to No. 2 Oklahoma in Preseason WNIT action

Junior Alysha Clark scored a game-high 31 points and added a game-best 16 rebounds for her first MT double-double.

Athletic Communications

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NORMAN, Okla. - No. 2 Oklahoma kept its distance with four players in double-figure scoring but the Sooners could not stop Middle Tennessee's [Alysha Clark](#) and her double-double, as Oklahoma tallied an 85-65 victory Wednesday evening in second round action of the Preseason WNIT inside the Lloyd Noble Center in Norman, Okla.

Middle Tennessee jumped out in front early on the strength of a pair of 3-pointers, one each by [Chelsia Lymon](#) and [Brandi Brown](#), and claimed an 8-4 edge at 17:38. However, the Sooners kept returning to Ashley Paris on their offensive possessions as the senior converted six of the team's first eight points and the teams entered the first media timeout knotted at eight apiece.

The Blue Raiders hung tough through the next four minutes and used a short 5-0 run to take a 14-12 lead. The spurt was highlighted by a triple from [Jackie Pickel](#) and capped by a backcourt steal by Lymon off an inbound pass and open dish to Clark at 12:34 forcing a timeout to be called. Oklahoma (2-0) responded on its next possession by feeding Carlee Roethlisberger for a driving baseline layup and the teams went to the under-12 minute timeout tied again, 14-14.

The basket by Roethlisberger ignited a 13-0 streak by the Sooners, as the hosts raced out to a 25-14 advantage over the next six-and-a-half minutes before Clark halted the run with a jumper at 6:10. She then rattled home a trey from the top of the arc to bring the Lady Raiders within 10, 29-19. Clark added her first set of free throws at 3:49 to again cut the deficit to 11, but Oklahoma pushed its lead to 15, 36-21, which included the only field goal of the half by first team All-America Courtney Paris at 3:13.

Clark added two more from the charity stripe at 2:09, but the Sooners ended the half on a 7-0 run, including a 3-pointer from Whitney Hand at the 1:25 mark, to take a 43-26 lead into the locker rooms.

After Clark and [Emily Queen](#) scored for MT early in the second half as the Lady Raiders netted four of the stanza's first six points, Oklahoma countered with a 12-5 run to build its lead to 22, 57-35, with 14:24 remaining.

Clark nearly put the team on her back over the next minute-and-a-half, making a pair of free throws coming out of the under-16 timeout, adding consecutive field goals and chipping in another set of charity tosses at 13:21. [Anne Marie Lanning](#) then drilled a 3-pointer with just over 13 minutes left bringing Middle Tennessee (1-1) back within 12, 57-45, and forcing another Sooner timeout to be called.

Oklahoma, however, went back to its All-American for the start of an 8-3 run with Lymon nailing her second 3-pointer of the contest at 11:50 for a 65-48 edge as the teams passed the 10-minute mark.

Lanning connected on another trey with just over five minutes left and Clark made two free throws at the 4:06 mark to pull the Raiders within 21, 78-57. Clark then drew the fifth foul on Courtney Paris at 3:20, removing the All-American from the game with 13 points and 13 rebounds in 28 minutes.

Clark's two points from the foul line were part of the team's final eight markers, six of which were made from the charity stripe.

Clark finished with game-high honors of 31 points and 16 points for her first double-double in a MT uniform and the 39th of her career. Both totals are the highest she has recorded while wearing the Blue Raider blue and white.

She was 8-of-18 from the field and 14-of-15 from the foul line, making more trips to the stripe than the entire Sooner squad. Ten of her 16 rebounds came on the defensive glass and she added three assists and three steals in playing the full 40 minutes.

Pickel joined her in double figures with 11 points on the strength of three 3-pointers. The Lady Raiders converted nine overall from 3-point territory.

Ashley Paris led nationally-ranked Oklahoma with 21 points, while Thompson poured in 20 to go along with her nine boards.



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Roethlisberger added 11 points on 5-of-6 field goals.

Middle Tennessee will return home to play host to Indiana at 7 p.m. Saturday inside the Murphy Center, also in the Preseason WNIT. The game is not part of the regular-season ticket package; therefore, MT fans will need to call 1-888-YES-MTSU to reserve tickets. Oklahoma also continues play in the Preseason WNIT, and will welcome Arizona State to Norman in a winner's bracket matchup at 7 p.m. Friday.

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Rick Insell On the game: "They have a good team. The intangible is that the kid stepped up, No. 21 (Amanda Thompson). We knew she had potential and I think that is the difference in their team this year and last year. Thompson has stepped her game up and they are going to be tough to handle down the stretch. Their conference is going to get them ready. I looked at their schedule and they have some out of conference games that will make them tough."

"We have a pretty good basketball team ourselves. They took us out of our game with the pressure and it was just tough for us to get inside. I was proud of our kids, they didn't quit. We stayed in there. We are underdogs just about everywhere we go because we play just about everyone in the country, from Tennessee to LSU to Georgia. We've beaten some of them and some of them we haven't. This was a great trip for us to play and we know what we need to do now to get better."

On the turnovers: "We average about 13 to 14 turnovers a game. At halftime we had 13 turnovers. We ended up with 18, so we only had five in the second half. We pretty much take care of the basketball but we didn't in the first half. I think a lot of those were unforced turnovers. They have a good basketball team and are well coached. (Oklahoma Head Coach) Sherri (Coale) does a good job."

Middle Tennessee Junior Forward [Alysha Clark](#) On playing Oklahoma: "It's different because of the caliber of players that they have but it's just like any other night, they lace up just like we lace up. You can't go in there intimidated just because they're an Oklahoma team. You have to go in there and get ready to play basketball. They are Division I and we are Division I. You can't back down from anybody you have to go in there playing your game and be confident in yourself."

On playing after transferring: "It's different but Coach Insell worked with me all last year and really pushed me to get past my comfort level. I'm out on the floor more than I was and he's making me reach that next level. I have some ways to go but I've made some progress. It's all from working hard last year and playing against (nation's leading scorer) Amber Holt in practice. Everybody working hard helps make me better."

On playing Courtney Paris: "We had to keep our position on Courtney (Paris) because she has such great hands and they look for her every time. She has such great hands that they can just throw it up anywhere and she'll go get it. I think we did a good job at being conscious of where she was and keeping our position. We played hard and put the pressure on them so passing to her wasn't as easy."

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