

Three-point barrage lifts Middle Tennessee past Arizona

The Blue Raiders hit a team season-high 13 shots from 3-point territory.

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee connected on seven 3-pointers among its first 10 shots to pull away early and dominate the perimeter in a 77-57 home triumph over Arizona in the final of three-straight home games Friday evening inside the Murphy Center. The Blue Raiders finished with a team season-high 13 triples against the Wildcats in a matchup, which featured the first Pac-10 Conference opponent to visit Murfreesboro.

Sophomore Anne Marie Lanning helped carry Middle Tennessee (4-1) to its third-straight win with her career-high 21 points on 7-of-12 attempts from 3-point territory. The seven made treys and 12 attempts are also career bests for the local product. She now has averaged 17.7 ppg since being inserted into the starting lineup for the Indiana game with 14 of her 17 field goals in the stretch coming from behind the arc. She has scored at least two triples in every regular-season contest this season.



Junior transfer Alysha Clark, the reigning Sun Belt Conference Player of the Week, matched Lanning for game-high scoring honors and added her second MT double-double with 21 points and 10 rebounds. The 40th double-double of her career, including 38 while playing two seasons at Belmont, was earned when she grabbed a defensive carom with 5:56 to play. It marks the fourth time in five games while wearing the Lady Raider uniform in which Clark has topped the 20-point barrier.

Jackie Pickel, a classmate of Clark's, joined the pair in double-figure scoring with 10 points, including three additional treys, moving her into an 11th-place tie with Paula Penttila (2000-03) with 100 career 3-pointers.

The Blue Raiders jumped out to an early 16-4 advantage, which included four 3-pointers, in the opening six minutes. The shots kept falling as MT built a 19-point edge three times in the frame, the last coming on a Chelsia Lymon layup with 37 seconds to play, giving the Lady Raiders a 44-25 lead. Two Reiko Thomas free throws with .3 seconds left in the half closed the scoring and the teams entered intermission with MT ahead, 44-27, behind 17-of-27 (63.0 percent) field goals.

Arizona (3-3) attempted to rally in the second half, closing within 15 on a three-point play by Thomas at 11:54, but the Wildcats would get no closer. Ify Ibekwe added two-straight buckets for Arizona two minutes later to again trim the margin to 16, 56-40, but Lanning's 3-pointer with 9:23 remaining silenced any further comeback attempt and proved to be her career-high trey.

The lead swelled to as high as 26, the last coming on a layup from junior Shytoria Davis at 4:37 for her first points in a Middle Tennessee uniform. The Blue Raiders then substituted and freshmen Abby Andrews and Molly McFadden saw their first playing time since the season opener against Lafayette.

Thomas paced the Cats with 19 points, including 9-of-9 free throws. Arizona connected on 17-of-22 charity tosses compared to a 4-of-6 effort for MT.

Ibekwe added a double-double of 16 points and 12 rebounds, but had 10 turnovers to just one assist as the Blue Raiders forced 29 total ball changes. Amina Njonkou gave the Wildcats a trio in double-figure scoring with 11 points.

Middle Tennessee will step outside of the Murphy Center for only the second time this season when it travels to Baton Rouge, La., for a 1 p.m. Sunday contest at LSU. The Blue Raiders defeated the then-No. 8 Tigers, 67-56, Dec. 28, 2007, inside the Murphy Center.

Middle Tennessee Head Coach Rick Insell

On tonight's win

"We shoot the ball pretty well at times and tonight was one of those nights. When we do that we are a tough basketball team. When they tried to shut us down outside we got four or five baskets on the inside. The players did a great job recognizing what we had and taking advantage of it. Arizona has a better team than they showed tonight and have a lot of size and lateral quickness. They had a player or two that were hurt and we took them out of their game a little bit."

On playing against Arizona's size

"We tell our players they do have to block out and not allow the other team to dominate the boards. At times, they did dominate the boards. They had fifteen offensive rebounds. They were pretty good at that."

On forcing 29 turnovers

"We did not want to allow them to get into any half-court offense. The players did a great job flagging the ball, getting deflections and getting in position to take charges. It frustrated them a little bit and caused them to have to do some things that they did not want to do early. That is what you are

supposed to do with your defensive pressure and I was really proud of our team."

On the three-point shooting

"We saw their players getting a little tired and tried to get our post players to run the floor. We started pushing Alicia (Clark) and Emily (Queen) down the floor and started looking for them. We were able to pick up a couple of quick baskets off that. When they tried to shut that down then Anne Marie (Lanning) and Jackie (Pickel) took over on the outside."

On Anne Marie Lanning and Jackie Pickel

"Anne Marie is a player and a winner. She is undersized where she is playing but she just gets the job done. That is what you want. They have big motors and that is what I like about them. Jackie runs someone to death every night. She is causing the opposition trouble mentally, physically and emotionally. We designed it like that and we hope the other team puts their best player on her because she is not going to run out of energy."

On getting three wins in the homestand

"This was a big win tonight. They came in but we pretty well dominated. That tells you a little about where our program is now. You are not going to come into (the Murphy Center) and push us around. Look at the teams we have played - Oklahoma, Indiana, Arizona, Chattanooga and Lafayette. We have played a quality schedule up to this point in the season."

On the bench

"It got a little longer tonight. I thought (Shytoria Davis) did well when she came into the game. She had a great block but the biggest thing I saw out of her tonight was her effort. She gave it her all the whole time she was in the game. Dana (Garrett) and Tina (Stewart) also gave us some good minutes."

On tonight's crowd

"We have some great fans and are only going to get bigger and bigger. I am very happy with the crowd tonight."

Junior guard Jackie Pickel

On the team's three-point shooting

"(Strength Coach) Matt Riley made a joke before the game that he felt it was going to be a three-point shooting night and I guess he hit it on the head. That got us going."

On how this year's team compares to years past

"We have stressed all off-season and up to this point that this is a different type of team than Coach Insell is used to having. He has always had that go-to player but now we all have to make shots and it important to us to play as a team."

On the team's quality schedule

"Any time you are playing teams like we have then you are playing to get into the NCAA Tournament. If we go to the tournament then we are going to need to play the best teams we can."

On the team's defense

"Coach Insell really stressed team defense in practice this week after the amount of turnovers we had in the Chattanooga game. We did a lot better job of communicating and matching up off the press."

Sophomore guard Anne Marie Lanning

On the team at this point in the season

"I feel like we are all really together as a team this year and it allows everyone's confidence to be raised. We have progressed every game and that has been a large part of it."

On hitting a career-high seven 3-pointers

"Coach (Tom) Hodges told me at halftime to take advantage of Arizona putting (Ify Ibekwe) on me. She was leaving me open to shoot on the 3-point line."

On playing LSU on Sunday

"Starting right now our team has to be focused. They are going to be focused on defending their house. We need to be focused, play our game and not worry about what they are going to do."

Arizona Wildcats Head Coach Niya Butts

On the team's loss to Middle Tennessee

"I definitely didn't think we played like we played in the previous five games. To be quite honest with you, I was very disappointed."

On the aggressive defense by Middle Tennessee

"Certainly, it is going to be hard to win a ball game turning the ball over 29 times against a team that is very disciplined and aggressive defensively. It was hard to get in a rhythm when you do that. We rebounded the ball pretty good offensively, but we couldn't get the ball down there to do that. Anytime you allow an opponent to shoot 50 percent from the field, you decrease your chances of winning the basketball game. I was really disappointed with the way we competed. I didn't think we competed."

On if Middle Tennessee presented any unexpected challenges

"No. They did everything that we expected them to do. With our poise and focus tonight, it really bit us in the butt."

On some players that made a key contribution in tonight's loss

"I thought Reiko (Thomas) was one of the bright spots in the game. She competed for 40 minutes. I thought she gave up some plays. For the most part, she was one of the ones that kept us in the game with her effort. I thought Sarah Hays gave us some positive minutes, effort wise. That's what we are going to need. Naturally, we are going to have to have it by committee and tonight we only had it from a few kids."

Newspaper Box Score Arizona vs Middle Tennessee 11/28/08 7 p.m. at Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Murphy Center) At Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Murphy Center) MIDDLE TENNESSEE 77, ARIZONA 57 ARIZONA (3-3) Thomas, Reiko 5-11 9-9 19; Ibekwe, Ify 6-7 4-7 16; Njonkou, Amina 5-9 1-1 11; Clements, Courtney 2-7 0-0 4; Frazier, Ashley 0-2 3-4 3; Hays, Sarah 1-1 0-0 2; Bofia, Beatrice 1-8 0-1 2; Hill, Faihza 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 20-47 17-22 57. MIDDLE TENNESSEE (4-1) Lanning, Anne Marie 7-13 0-0 21; Clark, Alysha 9-16 2-2 21; Pickel, Jackie 3-7 1-2 10; Lymon, Chelsia 4-5 0-0 9; Brown, Brandi 3-5 0-0 6; Queen, Emily 1-5 1-2 4; Davis, Shytoria 1-1 0-0 2; Stewart, Tina 1-3 0-0 2; Garrett, Dana 1-4 0-0 2; McFadden, Molly 0-0 0-0 0; Andrews, Abby 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 30-60 4-6 77. Arizona..... 27 30 - 57 Middle Tennessee..... 44 33 - 77 3-point goals--Arizona 0-5 (Thomas, Reiko 0-1; Clements, Courtney 0-1; Frazier, Ashley 0-1; Hill, Faihza 0-2), Middle Tennessee 13-28 (Lanning, Anne Marie 7-12; Pickel, Jackie 3-5; Lymon, Chelsia 1-2; Queen, Emily

1-3; Clark, Alysha 1-2; Stewart, Tina 0-2; Brown, Brandi 0-2). Fouled out--Arizona-None, Middle Tennessee-None. Rebounds--Arizona 35 (Ibekwe, Ify 12), Middle Tennessee 26 (Clark, Alysha 10). Assists--Arizona 9 (Thomas, Reiko 3), Middle Tennessee 22 (Queen, Emily 6). Total fouls--Arizona 11, Middle Tennessee 21. Technical fouls--Arizona-None, Middle Tennessee-None. A-3012

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