

Second half run keys road Sun Belt victory for Lady Raiders

MT broke open a close game in the second half to defeat North Texas

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DENTON, Texas - Juniors Alysha Clark and Brandi Brown each scored multiple buckets in a 12-0 Middle Tennessee second half run to break open a close game and lead the Blue Raiders to a 72-52 road Sun Belt Conference victory Wednesday afternoon over North Texas at The Super Pit in Denton, Texas. The win gave MT double-digit triumphs among its opening 14 games of the 2008-09 campaign and closed the 2008 calendar year.

After the Blue Raiders built a nine-point, 37-28, halftime lead, Jackie Pickel helped push the lead to double-digits with a 3-pointer at 17:24 of the second half. However, the host Mean Green never quit, and a Kelli Buckley steal and ensuing jumper with 8:35 to play cut the deficit to three, 49-46.

Middle Tennessee, however, turned to its leading scorer as it had most of the game and Clark took control. She scored the next four points before Brown hit a pair of 3-pointers with Clark adding another layup giving the Lady Raiders a 61-46 edge at the 5:23 mark.



The closest North Texas would get the remainder of the game would be 14, 63-49, on the front-end of a two-shot free throw set by Mansa El with 3:52 to play. The Blue Raiders would close the game with a 9-3 spurt and saw their advantage swell to a game-high 22, 72-50, on a Chelsia Lymon layup with 32 seconds on the clock.

Both teams struggled from the field early, but the Blue Raiders jumped ahead on a 7-0 run after allowing the Mean Green to score the first basket. A pair of free throws each by Pickel and Clark kept MT ahead, 15-8, but North Texas (5-8, 1-2 Sun Belt) would score the next three points to close within four, 15-11, at the under-12 timeout.

The hosts came out of the timeout by tallying the next five points, including field goals from Yari Escalera and Tamara Torru to take a 16-15 advantage with 7:19 remaining in the frame. The Mean Green kept the Lady Raiders off the scoreboard for nearly six minutes during the stretch.

Middle Tennessee (10-4, 2-0 Sun Belt) finally ended the drought with a layup from Emily Queen at 6:37 and traded baskets with North Texas for a 19-19 score. The Blue Raiders then recorded a 7-3 spurt over the next two minutes, opening a 26-22 edge which was capped by a transition 3-pointer from Lymon at 3:12. MT remained in front by scoring its final eight points of the half from the charity stripe, one more than NT converted from the foul line in the final 4:07. The Blue Raiders entered the locker room with a 37-28 lead following a pair of charity tosses by Lymon with 0.8 seconds to go.

Clark finished with her fifth double-double in an MT uniform and 43rd overall of her career with game-high 27 points and 17 rebounds. The 17 boards are the most she has collected as a Lady Raider, topping the 16 she hauled in at No. 2 Oklahoma Nov. 19. She also accounted for 60.0 percent (3-of-5) of the team's blocked shots, one shy of her career-best tally.

Pickel joined her in double figures with 13 points on the strength of three 3-pointers, while Brown and Lymon each poured in nine markers. Dana Garrett gave Middle Tennessee another lift off the bench, adding eight points (3-of-3 field goals) and six caroms in 17 minutes.

The Mean Green was led by Brittany James' double-double of 11 points and 10 rebounds. She was the only North Texas player to reach double figures in either category. Amber Jackson, who entered the game averaging nearly 17 points and 11 rebounds an outing, was limited to just eight points and four boards.

The Lady Raiders also grabbed a team season-high 42 rebounds to win the battle of the glass, 42-37, against a Mean Green squad which ranked second in the Sun Belt in rebounding.

The Blue Raiders will continue Sun Belt Conference action with their first game of the new calendar year by traveling to Mobile, Ala., and facing South Alabama at 2:05 p.m. Sunday inside the Mitchell Center.

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