

# Middle Tennessee uses second half rally to remain perfect in Sun Belt

## Blue Raiders are 6-0 in the league and have won nine straight overall

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### **BOWLING GREEN, Ky. -**

Middle Tennessee found itself trailing much of the first half but halftime adjustments allowed the Lady Raiders to gut out a come-from-behind 68-56 victory at rival Western Kentucky Wednesday night inside E.A. Diddle Arena in Bowling Green, Ky.

MT and WKU traded taking the lead five times and knotted the score three other instances throughout the opening 20 minutes. However, it was in the second half where the Lady Raiders exerted control and pulled out the 12-point victory, their ninth straight overall.

Middle Tennessee (14-4, 6-0 Sun Belt) was down three, 25-22, at the intermission, but never quit. Amy McNear gave the Lady Toppers a five-point edge early in the second half, but the Blue Raiders, who are receiving votes in both national polls for the second-straight week, chipped away at the lead while forcing turnovers on the defensive end.



Point guard Chelsia Lymon, who missed all but six minutes of the previous two games, returned to full strength and hit a 3-pointer at 14:00 to give MT its first lead of the second stanza, 34-33. The score remained nip-and-tuck until Anne Marie Lanning buried another triple at 12:09 to give the Blue Raiders a 38-36 lead, one which they would not relinquish.

Over the next five minutes, until 7:23, Middle Tennessee saw its lead swell to double digits, 51-41, on an Alysha Clark jumper. Hope Brown then hit a trey to cut the deficit to seven, arousing a strong response from the WKU crowd. However, Jackie Pickel would not let the crowd stay involved very long as she answered right back with a 3-pointer of her own at 7:01 which helped set the tone for the remainder of the game.

Forty seconds later Brandi Brown hit a trey, followed by a halfcourt steal and ensuing layup from Lymon, pushed the margin to a game-high 13, 59-46, at the 5:56 mark.

WKU (9-7, 3-3 Sun Belt) trimmed the deficit to seven three times down the stretch, but the game's final five points were scored by MT to seal the final score.

In the first half, Brown hit the game's opening two buckets, including a 3-pointer, to put MT ahead 5-0. The Lady Toppers rallied with a 9-3 run for a 9-8 lead. WKU's largest first half lead became five following four-straight markers by Hope Brown, including a layup at 8:48 for an 18-13 advantage.

Dana Garrett helped keep MT in the contest with a 3-pointer at 5:21, knotting the score at 20-20. The teams were tied one final time in the frame, 22-22, before the Lady Toppers' Kenzie Rich hit an off-balanced 3-pointer which rattled around the rim before dropping with 1:08 to play for the final points for the first half.

Clark finished with a game-high 18 points, while grabbing nine rebounds to finish one board shy of her eighth double-double this season and 46th of her career. Brown poured in 17 points, including a team-best three triples from downtown.

Emily Queen also almost registered a double-double, concluding the game with nine points and a MT-high 10 caroms.

Arnika Brown paced WKU with a double-double effort of 16 points and 20 rebounds. McNear (13), Hope Brown (12) and Rich (11) provided the Lady Toppers with a quartet in double-figure scoring.

Middle Tennessee, which has a three-game lead in the East Division, will put its winning streak on the line at 4:30 p.m. Saturday against the only other unbeaten team in the conference, UALR, in Little Rock, Ark. The Lady Trojans lead the Sun Belt's West Division.

## **Middle Tennessee quotes vs. WKU**

### **Head coach Rick Insell**

*On Chelsia Lymon's play*

"What we started doing was Chelsia started pushing the ball and we started running Alysha (Clark) to the rim. That isolated her down there with one person, which opened up Jackie (Pickel), Anne Marie (Lanning) and also Brandi Brown. They were trying to double-down and we had the off-side. We missed it a couple times and then Chelsia knocked down a 3 in the dead corner. The big thing was Chelsia pushing it against their press.

"They have a lot of athleticism. Arnika (Brown) does a great job inside with her body, much like Clark. I've never seen Clark have a game like tonight, though, with 11 turnovers."

*On the team's balance*

"When we moved Dana Garrett in, that was a big 3. If she would have gone in and penetrated and got more shots, she would have helped us a lot more. The 3 that she hit, we needed at that point. And with Anne Marie playing at point guard when Chelsia got in foul trouble, she was able to give her some air. Anne Marie and Jackie, what can we say about those kids? They have played together the last couple years and unbelievably close. I thought Emily (Queen) did an excellent job against Arnika, although she still got 20 rebounds and 16 points. I will tell you this - Emily fought from the time it went up all the way through. We've had Emily shutting down people on the perimeter, but we moved her inside tonight."

*On value of the win*

"I still think Western's a factor in the race. They were better tonight than what I had seen on film the last two or three games. They are going to get better. They have lost (Dominique) Duck and are still trying to find their identity and chemistry with this bunch, along with their substitution pattern."

"Right now, we are three games up on this side. We're happy about that."

*On Jackie Pickel hitting her 3-pointers*

"That's Jackie Pickel. She has hit those shots for us. I can remember the first game she played, at Old Dominion, where we were down four and she hit four 3s in a row. That is just the way she is. We find her and know she may miss six in a row, but in a situation like that, she is going to bury it. She has unbelievable focus. She is just playing lights out for us this year. We're really happy with her and she did a good job outside on her perimeter defense."

**Chelsia Lymon**

*On the frustration scoring first half and how things turned around in the second half*

"We weren't too frustrated. We just weren't taking our time with our shots. When we start rushing our shots, we play into the other team's favor. Second half, we wanted to concentrate on finishing and rebounding. When we came out in the second half, it was basically to keep going to what was working and in our transition. We didn't really change anything but pushing it harder on transition."

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