First-half run sparks runaway victory for Lady Raiders

MT outscored Arkansas State 25-4 over the final 9:55 of the opening stanza

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee broke open a three-point game with a 25-4 run to close the first half and never looked back in picking up a 91-51 triumph over Arkansas State Wednesday evening inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The victory keeps the Lady Raiders unbeaten in their last 11 games and in Sun Belt Conference action.

Neither team could pull away by more than four points through the game's opening eight minutes with Ebonie Jefferson's offensive rebound and putback keeping the Red Wolves within two, 15-13, at the 12:26 mark. The Blue Raiders had gained the early 2-0 lead on an Alysha Clark layup in the game's first 30 seconds and never surrendered the advantage during the contest, but the score was tied on two occasions during the beginning stretch.

Following Jefferson's bucket, Chelsia Lymon nailed a 3-pointer at 12:08 sparking an 8-0 spurt giving MT a 10-point cushion, 23-13, at 11:18. Arkansas State (9-10, 3-5 Sun Belt), however, did not quit as it scored the next seven points in just over a minute, capped by a 3-pointer by Caroline Starr, to trim the deficit to three, 23-20, with 9:55 to play.

Middle Tennessee (16-4, 8-0 Sun Belt) then got its offensive engines roaring, outscoring the visitors 25-4 the remainder of the half to take a 48-24 lead at intermission. The Blue Raiders opened the dominant period with a 16-0 streak before Sherina Scott halted it with a layup with 3:59 remaining.

Brandi Brown converted all three of her triples in the stretch, tying her with Jackie Pickel for the most by a Lady Raider in the game. MT finished with 12 as a team pushing their season total to 176, which already ranks fifth in school history and is just four shy of the fourth-place effort set in 2006.

Shania Hurst attempted to bring ASU back in the early stages of the second stanza with a 3-pointer of her own at 17:52 to cut the gap down to 21, 52-31. The Red Wolves would not get any closer the remainder of the contest.

Clark helped pad the lead with a layup at 10:48 for the first 30-point margin, 69-39. The difference became 37 points, 82-45, when the Blue Raiders began substituting their bench players in with nearly five minutes left on the clock. Tina Stewart converted 1-of-2 free throws with 48 ticks to play before Veronica Smith countered with the same execution on the other end 13 seconds later for the game's final points.

Clark poured in 10-of-12 from the field in netting a game-high 25 points. She was one of four starters to reach double figures and was joined by Emily Queen (15 points), Pickel (13) and Brown (11). Anne Marie Lanning came off the bench to post 11.

Queen nearly had her fourth double-double of the season and sixth of her career, finishing with game-best honors of nine caroms. Middle Tennessee won the rebounding battle, 37-27.

Jefferson paced Arkansas State with 19 points, while Hurst added 12. Scott gathered a team-high six boards.

The Lady Raiders, who have received votes in both national polls for the third-straight week, are tied with Oklahoma for the seventh-longest winning streak in the country with 11.

Middle Tennessee will hit the road for its next game, a 4:30 p.m. Saturday tip, at New Orleans before returning home for a pair of contests next week.

MT Quotes vs. Arkansas State

Coach Rick Insell

On tonight's game
"I was really proud of our defense holding them to 51 total points. They have a really athletic ball club and we talked about playing really good team defense instead of just individual defense. They have a better team than what they showed tonight. So I'm really happy with the way the kids played."

On player's understanding their roles
"They know what they need to do. When Shytoria Davis got the ball and traveled I thought she was hogging the shot. To get playing time you need to climb the ladder and right now we don't need her to score. We need her to play defense, rebound and block shots. That's her role. Molly McFadden's the same way. We called some timeouts late to coach those two. I thought Tina Stewart did a good job when she went in, but I coached those girls just like I coached the rest of them because we're

going to need those players before the year is over."

On the significance of being ranked near the top 25
"It helps with recruiting. Every paper in the country carries the *USA Today* and AP polls and the parents, kids and basketball supporters that know anything about the women's game see that every morning. When they see our name there, it helps when we go into the homes of those players. We have to go after the same kids that Tennessee, Oklahoma and Vanderbilt go after to be successful. We haven't gotten any of them yet but I promise they know about Middle Tennessee State."

On the stigma of being a top 25 team
"When it gets down to the end and the committee is looking at who will get into the tournament they're going to look at some of those programs that are there year in and year out regardless of record. We may have four losses and get grouped with a team with 12 losses. It shouldn't happen because of our schedule, but they might be the more traditional power. We need to be like Louisiana Tech was in the 1980s."

On five players in double figures
"Since we've come back from Little Rock we haven't had one offensive practice. We've been working on our rebounding, our angles and our defense. I think tonight it showed. They're a lot better team than 51 points. They're very athletic and had two or three kids make pre-season all conference. Plus they were picked to win the West Division and we got 91 on them. Our motivation is to keep it out of the committee's hands. If we win out, we'll get in the tournament. That's our goal."

Alysha Clark

On start of the game
"The past two games coach has been on me about not playing my game. So tonight I really wanted to come out and show my teammates that I can handle it and reward them for giving me the ball. I don't want them to lose confidence in me getting the job done. So I wanted to come out tonight, step up and get the job done."

On tonight's defensive pressure
"Coach has been stressing that he wants us to come out here and defend. We've really been working on our defense and feel like it helps our offense a lot. When we can come out and force the other team to give us the ball that just turns into easy baskets for us. I think we did a really good job of that tonight."

On keeping the throttle down
"We're not going to back down from anybody. Once we get into that rhythm of being in the right position we go for it. Coach says when you smell blood you go for the kill. And that's what we did tonight and we really have to keep it up."

Brandi Brown

On playing well when Alysha gets going down low
"Usually there are three people on Alysha so if we can hit shots from the outside it'll just open her up down low even more. We always have the opportunity to have the shot when they're double teaming Alysha because somebody has to be open."

On lack of fouls
"We're usually aggressive and have a lot of fouls so that surprises me. When we're pressing it gives us less of a chance to foul. When we're in our half court defense then we get in foul trouble a lot more because we're not as aggressive."

Arkansas State Head Coach Brian Boyer

On tonight's game
"The game seemed like it was 10 hours long, their press really rattled us. We kind of had a snowball effect and missed some wide-open looks at the basket. When you do that against a top quality team like Middle Tennessee, they bury you and that is exactly what happened tonight. We were just in no man's land tonight. We left shooters open the majority of the night and they made us pay for it."

On their next game
"We really have to rally for our next game. The season is getting late and Florida Atlantic is off to a good start. They have really found themselves and are playing well. We are up for a stiff test on Sunday. From here we are going to talk as a team and get ready to face FAU."

Newspaper Box Score Arkansas State vs Middle Tennessee 01/21/09 7 p.m. at Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Murphy Center) At Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Murphy Center) MIDDLE TENNESSEE 91, ARKANSAS STATE 51 ARKANSAS STATE (9-10, 3-5 SBC) Jefferson, Ebonie 8-14 3-4 19; Hurst, Shania 5-7 0-2 12; Smith, Veronica 1-4 3-4 5; Scott, Sherina 1-9 2-6 4; Starr, Caroline 1-2 0-0 3; Stoudemire, LaDe'sha 1-1 0-0 2; Henke, Linsay 1-1 0-0 2; Taylor, Jazmine 1-3 0-0 2; Dunn, Elyseia 1-3 0-0 2; Schlup, Lyndsay 0-4 0-0 0; Lewis, Meghan 0-2 0-0 0; Hiles, Brittney 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 20-51 8-16 51. MIDDLE TENNESSEE (16-4, 8-0 SBC) Clark, Alysha 10-12 5-8 25; Queen, Emily 5-8 3-4 15; Pickel, Jackie 4-5 2-2 13; Lanning, Anne Marie 4-8 1-1 11; Brown, Brandi 4-13 0-0 11; Lymon, Chelsia 3-6 0-0 8; Garrett, Dana 1-2 3-4 5; Davis, Shytoria 1-2 0-0 2; Stewart, Tina 0-0 1-2 1; McFadden, Molly 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 32-58 15-21 91. Arkansas State..... 24 27 - 51 Middle Tennessee..... 48 43 - 91 3-point goals--Arkansas State 3-6 (Hurst, Shania 2-2; Starr, Caroline 1-2; Taylor, Jazmine 0-1; Lewis, Meghan 0-1), Middle Tennessee 12-25 (Brown, Brandi 3-9; Pickel, Jackie 3-4; Queen, Emily 2-4; Lanning, Anne Marie 2-4; Lymon, Chelsia 2-4). Fouled out--Arkansas State-None, Middle Tennessee-None. Rebounds--Arkansas State 27 (Scott, Sherina 6), Middle Tennessee 37 (Queen, Emily 9). Assists--Arkansas State 8 (Jefferson, Ebonie 3), Middle Tennessee 22 (Lanning, Anne Marie 4; Pickel, Jackie 4; Brown, Brandi 4). Total fouls--Arkansas State 18, Middle Tennessee 13. Technical fouls--Arkansas State-None, Middle Tennessee-None. A-2806

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