Clark scores career high as Blue Raiders remain perfect in SBC action

Becomes one of only four Blue Raiders in program history to reach 40 points

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Junior Alysha Clark put the Middle Tennessee women's basketball team on her back Saturday afternoon and carried it to a 91-75 victory over ULM inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Clark finished with a career-high 40 points, becoming only the fourth Lady Raider in program history to crack the 40-point barrier in a single game.

She tallied her career best on 16-of-21 field goals and 8-of-10 free throws, while also swiping a career-high seven steals on the defensive end in her first game after being named a Midseason Top 20 Candidate for the Wooden Award, college basketball's most prestigious individual honor.

The 40 points place her sixth in school history for a single game and are one shy of the Murphy Center record for a Lady Raider. Two players, Tawanya Mucker and Amber Holt, hold the facility mark at 41 points with Holt's effort coming last season against LSU on Dec. 28, 2007.

Holt also set the standard for a single game, netting 44 at ULM Jan. 24, 2008. Clark also joins the

40-plus club with Kim Webb, who posted 42 at Eastern Kentucky during the 1986-87 campaign.

While Clark reached the 40-point plateau, she was not the only offensive contributor for Middle Tennessee (19-4, 11-0 Sun Belt), which ran its winning streak to 14 games. Chelsia Lymon and Jackie Pickel joined Clark in double figures with 12 and 10 points, respectively, on a combined 9-of-13 from the field.

Brandi Brown and Dana Garrett paced the Blue Raiders with five rebounds apiece. MT forced 33 turnovers and turned them into 40 points. Nearly two-thirds of the team's 91 total came in the paint with 60 being scored compared to just 22 by the Warhawks.

Kassie Courtney led a quartet of ULM (12-9, 5-5 Sun Belt) players in double figures with 16. Ashley Wallis (15 points), Sannisha Williams (11) and Sumar Leslie (10) joined her. Williams finished with the game's only double-double, grabbing a game-high 14 boards.

The Blue Raiders opened the game with a 12-3 surge, featuring six points by Clark, covering nearly the first five minutes. The Warhawks chipped away at the margin, slicing it to five, 16-11, on a Jesse Carrier 3-pointer with 12:49 to play in the opening frame.

MT then exploded for a 12-1 run, opening a 16-point cushion on an old-fashioned three-point play by Lymon at 8:54. ULM, however, remained a pesky opponent and dropped the gap down to 10, 31-21, on a triple from Leslie with 6:52 to play in the half.

The first half lead would grow to as high as 15 on two other occasions before Kassie Courtney drilled the Warhawks' final trey of the half with 40 seconds on the clock for a nine-point Blue Raider lead, 45-36. Garrett added the final bucket of the stanza, giving Middle Tennessee and 11-point halftime advantage.

The Lady Raiders carried their momentum over to the start of the second half, tallying the first nine points, all by Clark, for a 56-36 lead just two minutes in. ULM was determined to climb back into the game and Courtney buried another 3-pointer at 14:50, trimming the gap down to a dozen, 61-49.

Over the next six-and-a-half minutes, MT pushed its lead back to 21, 74-53, on another Clark layup. The edge grew to as high as 24, 79-55, on the front end of free throw tosses by Lymon. The Warhawks brought the margin back to 14 two times over the stretch run, but could not overcome the Blue Raider advantage.

Middle Tennessee will hit the road for its next game, an 8 p.m. Central contest, at Denver Wednesday.

Middle Tennessee Quotes
Head Coach Rick Insell

On tonight's game
"We did a poor job of rebounding tonight, a very poor job. I thought it was one of our worst jobs defensively. It probably is the most threes in last 10 years against us and they knocked them down when they were open. Alsyha (Clark) did pretty good job overall not our best game. But, it was a good win for the conference and we will now get ready for Denver. One of our goals was go undefeated in January. We knew January was going to be a tough month and we knew that if we

took care of January, we could put a lot of people in our rearview mirror."

On the next game against Denver
"We are happy about where we are at and we have a big game at Denver. There will be a lot on that game. We just need to go out there and take care of business."

On the play of Kim Webb vs. Alysha Clark
"Kim Webb was better off bounce and jump shot facing basket. Clark is better inside. Her body language inside is unreal and her passion has really picked up. She can handle the ball and shoot it right, but when she gets inside she is really unstoppable. Someone her size is not going to stop her. They are getting her the ball when she is open and making good passes towards her and that is just as important as finishing the shot."

Junior forward Alysha Clark

On the win
"When our guards, and everybody, can shoot from the outside that just opens the lanes up so much more. Coach stresses to me that when you get in there one on one, you take it to the basket and finish. Our guards did a good job of throwing it inside to me. I was surprised at how wide open I was and how much space I had to work with."

On scoring 40 points
"I wasn't aware of my point total at all. Jackie told me on the bench 'good job, 40 points tonight.' And I was like, 'Really? I didn't even know that.' I never look at the scoreboard for that type of stuff. I just look at the board at the end to make sure we got the W. I think 37 was my career high prior to this game."

On using left hand
"I don't think about it. I just use it. I notice myself going left a lot now. I have been focusing on using my right hand more now because more teams are defending my left. So, as long as I continue to go to both sides I think I will be ok."

Junior guard Jackie Pickel

On the team's defensive performance
"Our focus was on (Lottie) Moore, and we held her to [four] points but we let other players go off. And the turnovers might have been contributed to the awkwardness of the game; it was just chaos out there. We didn't match up very well off the press."

ULM Head Coach Mona Martin

On tonight's game
"You see why Middle Tennessee is ranked in the country.They are good defensively and capitalize on your mistakes. Alysha Clark can get it done inside. And then Chelsia Lymon can penetrate and hurt you. I felt like we would compete better than we did. I'm disappointed in the way we played."

On halftime adjustments
"We talked about taking better care of the ball, but I didn't think we did a very good job of it. We came out and had three straight turnovers and then we settled down. Unfortunately, before I could

make the correct adjustments, we were down 17 points. It happened that fast. Good teams do that to you."

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