Clark proves unstoppable as Blue Raiders clinch division tie

Continues to dominate with a school-record 50 points

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TROY, Ala. - Middle Tennessee junior forward Alysha Clark set a new school record and tied the Sun Belt Conference standard with a career-best 50 points, leading a second half 75-60 runaway victory at Troy Wednesday night inside Trojan Arena in Troy, Ala. Clark's output, two-thirds of the Lady Raiders' total on the evening, helped MT seal at least a tie for the conference's East Division crown.

Clark was nearly unstoppable, tallying her 50 points on 20-of-28 field goals and 10-of-11 free throws. She hit her last 10 charity tosses after missing her first attempt in becoming the only player in Middle Tennessee (21-4, 13-0 Sun Belt) history to reach the half-century mark. She topped her previous career high of 40, set Jan. 31 versus ULM, and surpassed Amber Holt's school record of 44 set last season at ULM.

The 50 points are the most scored by an NCAA Division I player this season, exceeding the 46 tallied by Murray State's Ashley Nicole Hayes Feb. 4 against Tennessee State. The record is also 10 shy of the all-time Division I mark of 60 registered by Long Beach State's Cindy Brown versus San Jose State Feb. 16, 1987.

She also tied the Sun Belt Conference standard, which was posted nearly 16 years to the day by

Arkansas State's Sonia Tate on Feb. 13, 1993, against Louisiana-Lafayette. Her 20 field goals made set a league mark for most in a Sun Belt game and are one shy of the overall SBC record.

The Midseason Top-20 Candidate for the Wooden Award, Early Season Naismith Trophy Watch List honoree, four-time Sun Belt Conference Player of the Week and member of the *Sports Illustrated*'s Faces in the Crowd for Feb. 9 added nine rebounds, including six on the offensive glass, two steals, one assist and one blocked shot while playing all 40 minutes.

Clark, however, did not do it alone as it may seem. She received help in the form of 10 points by Brandi Brown, including three 3-pointers, four assists and five steals from Chelsia Lymon, seven rebounds via Emily Queen and a crucial triple from Jackie Pickel.

All in all, the Blue Raiders shot 16-of-28 (57.1 percent) in the second half to pull away from a pesky Troy (11-13, 6-8 Sun Belt) squad which never seemed to go away in the opening frame. The Trojans hung tough with MT throughout the opening 20 minutes, not allowing the Lady Raiders to seize more than a seven-point lead before halftime.

Clark capped a game-opening run during which she scored 11 of the team's first 13 points with a layup to give Middle Tennessee its first seven-point cushion, 13-6, at the 15:26 mark. Brittnie Davis then scored five of the Trojans' next seven points, while MT was held scoreless, to bring Troy back even, 13 all, with 12:39 to play.

Middle Tennessee, however, would not let Troy take the lead after its bucket by Kylie Morrissy to claim a 2-0 advantage. The Lady Raiders kept the upper hand by turning to Clark for 21 first half points, as part of a 33-30 halftime edge.

The second half began with the teams trading baskets through the first three minutes, but a three-point play by Clark at 15:42, ignited a 15-3 spurt over the next six minutes allowing MT to pull away. Clark's old-fashioned three-point effort was one of three she had in the second half, defying any chance Troy had at stopping her.

The lead would swell to as much as 18 on Clark's layup to cap the spurt. Troy then mounted a mini-run of its own, a 9-2 surge over the next 2:23, to trim the deficit to 11. The Trojans closed within 10 twice down the stretch, the last at 2:48 following a pair of Morrissy free throws, but could not make the gap single digits again.

Davis finished with 22 points on 9-of-11 field goals to lead Troy, while Morrissy added 14. Danielle Realph grabbed a team-high four rebounds.

The Middle Tennessee win clinches at least a share of the East Division title for the Blue Raiders. MT is five games ahead of second-place Western Kentucky, who was idle Wednesday, with five regular-season games remaining.

The Lady Raiders will return to the Murphy Center for their next two games, beginning at 1 p.m. Sunday against North Texas. The contest will be MT's Pink Zone game and the Blue Raiders will don pink uniforms in support of cancer research. Six of the uniforms will be auctioned immediately following the game.

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