No. 25 Lady Raiders complete season sweep over Jaguars

Middle Tennessee won its 18th straight overall with the win

February 18, 2009 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The No. 25-ranked Middle Tennessee women's basketball team earned its 18th-straight victory and remained perfect in Sun Belt Conference action with a 90-64 triumph over visiting South Alabama inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn., Wednesday night.

The Blue Raiders, who entered the ESPN/*USA Today* Coaches Poll this week, tied the Sun Belt record for most regular-season conference wins over a four-year span with 57. The 1997-98 to 2000-01 Louisiana Tech squads previously set the mark.

Middle Tennessee (23-4, 15-0 Sun Belt) was led by the nation's leading scorer and reigning SBC Player of the Week, Alysha Clark, who registered her 12th double-double of the season with game-high totals of 30 points and 12 rebounds. The double-double is her ninth in league action and 50th of her career.

Clark was one of four Lady Raiders in double-figure scoring and was joined in the category by fellow starters Chelsia Lymon (20 points), Anne Marie Lanning (16) and Brandi Brown (12). The 20 markers by Lymon are a season high, while Lanning played 35 minutes in the absence of Emily Queen. Brown knocked down four 3-

pointers to move within one of fifth place on the school's all-time chart with 165 in her career.

Jessica Starling led a trio of South Alabama (18-9, 9-7 Sun Belt) players in double figures with 20 points. She buried a 25-foot triple to open the second half and helped close a 19-point MT halftime lead to 11 within the stanza's first three minutes on the strength of four 3-pointers. Starling hit a pair to complement another two long-range bombs from Shakira Nettles.

Nettles finished with 12 points, while Ra'Shawna Sippio contributed 10 after not missing any of her five field goal attempts. Shaniece Brunner grabbed a team-high eight rebounds, including six on the defensive glass.

Brown kick-started a 6-0 Blue Raider run to open the game with a 3-pointer at 18:55, but the Lady Jaguars battled back within one, 8-7, on Starling's first triple. After Sippio made the score 11-9 in Middle Tennessee's favor, the Lady Raiders rattled off the next nine points to open an 11-point cushion with 9:30 to play in the first half.

South Alabama would pull within seven, 20-13, at 7:51 on a pair of Vontrice Dennis free throws, but it would not get any closer the remainder of the game. The Blue Raiders countered a Karina Sproal 3-pointer with 2:21 remaining with an 8-1 spurt to close the half, which included a 3-pointer by Brown, an old-fashioned three-point play by Lymon and a pair of charity tosses from Lymon with four seconds to go, to take a 46-27 lead into the break.

The Lady Jags opened the second half on fire, making four of their first six shots, including three from beyond the arc, to trim the deficit to 11. Over the course of the next five minutes, MT slowly pushed its lead back to 20, capped by another three-point play from Lymon at 11:42.

Lanning buried a trifecta at 7:08 to keep the lead above 20 and the Blue Raiders never let it dip below that margin during the last portion of the contest. Molly McFadden's free throw with 1:11 showing on the clock provided Middle Tennessee with its largest lead of the contest at 28, 90-62, and gave the Lady Raiders a 4-0 record this season and 14-0 under head coach Rick Insell when tallying at least 90 points in a game.

The Blue Raiders will hit the road for the Sunshine State for their next two games and final pair of road contests during the regular-season. MT will begin the stretch with a 4 p.m. Central tip at Florida Atlantic in Boca Raton, Fla.

MT Quotes vs. South Alabama
Head Coach Rick Insell

On the team's effort tonight
"We let them play pitch and catch and they knocked down some shots and they got back in the ballgame. But, we stayed composed, made a couple shots and took their momentum away. I think the biggest negative for us tonight was that we didn't shoot well at all from the foul line. I was very disappointed with that. I don't think I've ever seen Anne Marie Lanning miss two back to back like that."

On wrapping up the conference
"The one thing we've talked about more than anything is going undefeated. That hasn't happened that often in this conference. So, that's our focus. And, you never know it may be a while before

somebody does this again."

How (Emily) Queen's loss affects the team
"You never want to lose a player like Emily Queen because she does so much for us. So in losing her it will make us a better team. Dana Garrett and Shytoria Davis will have to step up. Some of our starters have to play more minutes. I think when Chelsia Lymon went out (earlier in the season) and Anne Marie (Lanning) came in to take over the point, the team really found that we had more than one point guard and gave them confidence in themselves. It would be big if we could get two more wins without Emily. It will make us a better team."

On Chelsia's play tonight
"I think Chelsia was toying with South Alabama at times and that's why I took her out there for a little while. I very seldom get mad at her, but I got a little ill with her tonight because I thought she was toying with South Alabama and that's not us. Every possession has to mean something to us. She had a great night, but we have to keep our focus. You start toying with someone the next thing you know you get beat."

On the game being closer that it seemed
"I love our fans, but I think sometimes if we don't win by 30 they think something is wrong. But, there's nothing wrong we just played a good team tonight. And, we still scored 90 points on them. We did have some missed assignments, knock down our 3-pointers and hit our free throws that is another 100-point game."

Chelsia Lymon

On not getting a big run
"They didn't allow us to get that usual run we get. We got steals and scored, and then they'd come down and hit a three. I think coach said at half they hit four threes in a row at one point so they didn't allow us to get into our rhythm of getting that big run."

On 20-point performance tonight
"On the play when I followed Alysha's (Clark) shot we've worked on that in practice. The play spreads out our offense and leaves Alysha one-on-one. So I've been working in practice on the follow, of course she doesn't miss much, but I work on being there just in case."

On possible double-double
"I never thought about it until after the game when somebody talked about it and I never would've thought I would've had that many rebounds. But, I just went to the open spot and just grabbed the rebound."

Alysha Clark

On overall performance tonight
"I think tonight will show people I'm not just an offensive player. I know I need to work on defense, so I've been trying to better the whole year. And when you play like I did tonight it just gives you more confidence to go out and try harder."

On running the table
"I think it's really important. We've worked hard all summer and through the season to get to this

point. We played a really tough non-conference schedule and have really focused well during conference play. These two road games will be tough too because last year they came in here and we won rather easily but when we went down there it was tough because they're at home now. Also when you have a team come in that's undefeated they're going to play really tough because of the possibility of beating them. So we can't take either team lightly because they'll play their best."

On game being closer than the score showed
"We stayed consistent. We didn't get on that big run, but we didn't let down when they got on their run. And to be a great team you have to withstand their run and come back and answer. I think we did that tonight. I think it was a closer game than it seemed, but we just handled their pressure and handled the ball really well."

South Alabama Quotes
Head Coach Rick Pietri

On his team's performance
"Well we lost."

On Alysha Clark and the Lady Raiders
"She's really good. They're a really good team."

On areas to improve before the conference tournament
"Well I think we're playing pretty well. Middle Tennessee is just right now functioning at a level that is just above everybody else in our league. For them to be beaten, they're going to have to be off and somebody's going to have to be really on."

On (Jessica) Starling's performance
"She was good. She did some good things but she wasn't perfect. She's one of our leading scorers and we need her to do the kind of things she did for us tonight on the offensive end."

Printed on July 28, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/37020