

March 1, 2009

Blue Raiders clinch East Division title and tournament's No. 1 seed with win over WKU

Middle Tennessee clinches second Sun Belt crown in three years

Athletic Communications

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee put an emphatic stamp on the Sun Belt Conference regular-season crown with an 87-61 victory over rival Western Kentucky Sunday afternoon in a regionally-broadcast tip on Comcast/Charter Sports Southeast (CSS) inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

The Blue Raiders found themselves trailing 9-2 early before [Chelsia Lymon](#) hit the first of her four 3-pointers at 15:10 to start the rally. Lymon nailed three straight from long distance with her triple at 12:24 giving MT its first lead, 15-13. Middle Tennessee (25-5, 17-1 Sun Belt) never trailed the remainder of the game in cruising to its second league regular-season title in three seasons.

Lymon finished with 16 points to go along with her five assists and three rebounds, but the day belonged to teammate [Alysha Clark](#), the nation's leading scorer. Clark scored on 17-of-26 from the field, including her only 3-point attempt, and added 10-of-13 free throws to set the Murphy Center record with 45 points.

The previous arena mark was 41, set by a pair of players, the last coming from Amber Holt in the victory against No. 8 LSU Dec. 28, 2007. Clark's 45 points are her second highest of the season and complemented her 12 rebounds for her 14th double-double of the season, 11th against Sun Belt competition and 52nd overall of her career.

[Anne Marie Lanning](#) poured in 10 points and handed out a game-high tying six assists to provide MT with a trio of starters in double figures. [Jackie Pickel](#) nearly made the total four with nine points, all coming from long distance.

The Lady Toppers were led by 21 points from Hope Brown, who converted WKU's only two treys. Amy McNear (12 points) and LaTeira Owens (10) contributed to the visiting attack with double-digit scoring.

Middle Tennessee did not take long to build its lead past 10, as Lymon's go-ahead trifecta started a 17-5 spurt over the next four minutes. Her fourth long-range bomb gave the Blue Raiders a 29-18 advantage with 8:22 to play in the half, exciting the home crowd of 5,307.

Four minutes later the Lady Raiders turned to Clark for a pair of old-fashioned three-point players before the half, increasing their lead to as much as 21 in the opening 20 minutes. [Dana Garrett](#) put the final stamp on the first half with a baseline jumper just before the buzzer to send the teams into intermission with MT ahead, 48-28.

Clark again became the main focus of the offense early in the second half, helping Middle Tennessee swell its lead to 25, 63-38, with just over three-and-a-half minutes passed. WKU (16-12, 10-8 Sun Belt) netted the next seven points on a mini-run of its own through the next three minutes, but Clark halted the streak with a jumper at 12:50 to push the lead back to 20, 65-45.

Owens would bring the Lady Toppers within 21, 70-49, with 9:39 to go, but the visitors would not get any closer the remainder of the contest. Clark's layups at 5:15 and against at 3:14 helped MT to its largest advantage of 28 points before she was substituted for with 1:16 showing on the clock.

The triumph also concludes a season sweep over WKU for Middle Tennessee and gives the Lady Raiders wins in seven of the last 10 meetings in the series, all under head coach Rick Insell.

Middle Tennessee will enter the Sun Belt Conference Tournament as the No. 1 seed and face the winner of the No. 8/9 game at 12:30 p.m. Saturday in Hot Springs, Ark. The opponent will be the winner of No. 8 Florida Atlantic and No. 9 New Orleans.



Chelsia Lymon buried four first-half 3-pointers in rallying MT and leading the Lady Raiders to a Sunday victory over rival WKU. (Bradley Lambert)

MT Quotes vs. Western Kentucky

Head Coach Rick Insell

On winning the conference championship

"It's tough to do. It's a long grind. Every team in our conference has the chance to upset you. When we went to FAU, they outplayed us. They deserved to win and they did. So it's tough to win a championship and I feel for everyone around the country who is trying to win one."

On [Chelsia Lymon](#) bringing the team back in the first half

"Early on she let (Amy) McNear go to the basket a few times so I fired her up. Then she hit two or three shots in a row, which forced them to come out and guard her so then she went to the basket. That also opened up [Alysha Clark](#) down low. And she played well today too."

On first half turnovers

"It was big. We talked about it halftime and that's probably the difference in the ball game. We took of the ball really well. I told them at halftime I've been in that locker room down 20 before and it feels a lot better being in there up 20."

On making the NCAA Tournament

"I feel like we've done everything asked of us. Our strength of schedule is in the top 30, our RPI is like 32. We beat LSU down there, Indiana's playing well and Arizona's playing well too. Plus we went to Western Kentucky and UALR in the same week which is a hard stretch in our conference."

On state of team with tournament time coming up

"I think when [Emily Queen](#) comes back we'll be a lot better. We've gotten Dana Garret some good playing time, Anne Marie's played some more. [Shytoria Davis](#) has looked good at times. Also earlier this season Anne Marie and Chelsia were both out for a few games, so we haven't been healthy all year. But these kids have picked each other up when they needed to and played well."

On [Alysha Clark](#)'s performance

"She's a special kid. There at the end she came over to me and said 'Put Molly (McFadden) in.' How many kids would've done that? I had forgotten Molly hadn't been in and she was thinking about the rest of her teammates so that tells you a little bit about her. All she cares about is our team winning and whatever she has to do to make that happen. I haven't seen many ladies that have the knack for scoring like she does. I've seen men's players not many in the women's game."

[Alysha Clark](#)

On playing well today

"There was some motivation because I didn't play well up there. I wanted to come out and give our team a better performance. Plus it's the last game of the season at our place in front of our fans."

On Lymon's 3-pointers in the first half

"I think they opened things up for us. The last few games teams have been playing off her and she really came out and played well today."

On today's crowd

"It means a lot to play well in front of them. There aren't too many places in the country where you can go and have thousands of fans come to games. It just means a lot that they come out and support us and Coach Insell said we need to give them something to think about over the summer. So we wanted to come out and play well against them and that's what we did."

[Chelsia Lymon](#)

On igniting the team in first half

"Coach Insell always tells me it's the point guard's fault when things go wrong, and it's the point guard's fault when things go right. So when our team was down the only thing I could do was knock down my shots. I just took my time and settled down so I could knock my shots down."

On being in the tournament

"I don't think we're in yet because there are too many good teams in our conference. We have to go into the tournament with an attitude to win because it got taken away from us last year. So this year we have to play hard and with emotion."

On forcing turnovers and playing good defense

"Coach said we just need to go with their runs. They had a big one to open the game and we just had to take our time and do what we do best. So I think we did get under their skin a little bit with the turnovers but we just stayed with our game plan."

Western Kentucky Quotes

Associate Head Coach David Graves

On tonight's game

"I think we got off great start and as the game continued they made some shots and got hot and we had to make adjustments."

On the amount of turnovers

"We always have to take care of the ball. We work on it everyday and it's something you have to do in every game to be successful. The biggest thing was giving up second shots. When we play a team as hot as Middle is, we have to limit them to one shot, and I think that was the biggest stat on the paper."

On the focus today

"It could have been a focus issue. We were very focused to start off the game. I just think that when you're playing on the road basketball is a game of runs and you have to weather the runs. We made some runs and they made some and we didn't weather it as well. I thought we did a much better job in the second half after the first half that we had."

On next game against Louisiana-Monroe

"It was a tough game last time down there. They are a very athletic team, tough team and gritty. So it will be a tough match up. We are definitely glad that we are playing at home. We just have to go now and prepare for Monroe and get a little March Madness hopefully."

The road ahead at the Sun Belt Conference Tournament

"I think when it comes to tournament time you can't put too much on the seeding. You have to win games. You just have to take it one game at a time, you can't worry about what's next, and you have to worry about what is in front of you. It goes back to preparing for one possession at a time and one game at a time."

Newspaper Box Score WKU vs Middle Tennessee 03/01/09 3:30 p.m. at Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Murphy Center) At Murfreesboro, Tenn. (Murphy Center) MIDDLE TENNESSEE 87, WKU 61 WKU (16-12, 10-8 SBC) Brown, Hope 7-13 5-6 21; McNear, Amy 4-6 4-6 12; Owens, LaTeira 3-6 4-6 10; House, Caitlin 4-6 0-2 8; Magley, Jessica 3-8 0-0 6; Rich, Kenzie 2-6 0-1 4; Johnson, Jasmine 0-1 0-0 0; Obafemi, Vanessa 0-1 0-0 0; Brown, Arnika 0-0 0-0 0; Thomas, Teranie 0-3 0-1 0. Totals 23-50 13-22 61. MIDDLE TENNESSEE (25-5, 17-1 SBC) Clark, Alysha 17-26 10-13 45; Lymon, Chelsia 6-17 0-0 16; Lanning, Anne Marie 4-10 2-2 10; Pickel, Jackie 3-8 0-1 9; Brown, Brandi 2-6 0-0 5; Garrett, Dana 1-3 0-0 2; McFadden, Molly 0-0 0-0 0; Davis, Shytoria 0-1 0-0 0; Stewart, Tina 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 33-71 12-16 87. WKU..... 28 33 - 61 Middle Tennessee..... 48 39 - 87 3-point goals--WKU 2-9 (Brown, Hope 2-5; Rich, Kenzie 0-4), Middle Tennessee 9-30 (Lymon, Chelsia 4-12; Pickel, Jackie 3-7; Clark, Alysha 1-1; Brown, Brandi 1-5; Lanning, Anne Marie 0-5). Fouled out--WKU-House, Caitlin, Middle Tennessee-Brown, Brandi. Rebounds--WKU 36 (Magley, Jessica 6; McNear, Amy 6), Middle Tennessee 38 (Clark, Alysha 12). Assists--WKU 7 (McNear, Amy 6), Middle Tennessee 18 (Lanning, Anne Marie 6). Total fouls--WKU 18, Middle Tennessee 19. Technical fouls--WKU-None, Middle Tennessee-None. A-5307

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