

# All five starters reach double figures as Blue Raiders open tournament with win

## SBC Player of the Year Alysha Clark nets 35

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**HOT SPRINGS, Ark.** - All five of Middle Tennessee's starters scored in double figures with Sun Belt Player of the Year Alysha Clark leading the charge, as the Blue Raiders opened Sun Belt Tournament action with an 82-47 triumph over New Orleans Saturday afternoon inside the Summit Arena in Hot Springs, Ark. Middle Tennessee, the tournament's No. 1 seed after ending the regular season with the league's best record, pulled away in the second half against the No. 9 seed Lady Privateers.

Clark did not get her first bucket until Anne Marie Lanning found her for a layup at 11:50 of the first half; however, the nation's leading scorer finished with a game-high 35 points for her ninth-consecutive contest with at least 30. By making 14 of her 20 attempts from the field, Clark surpassed Chrissy Givens for second on the school's single-season list for field goals raising her mark to 310. Clark's 35-point effort is her 12th this season reaching 30, setting a single-season program standard.



Lanning nailed all three of her shots, each coming from 3-point territory, to finish as one of three Lady Raiders with 11 points. Joining her with 11 were Jackie Pickel, on the strength of three triples of her own, and the league's Defensive Player of the Year and Third Team All-SBC Chelsia Lymon.

The final starter in double-figure scoring was Third Team All-Sun Belt choice Brandi Brown with 12.

New Orleans (14-17) finished the season behind a team-high 15 points from Jada Frazier, who played 30 minutes before fouling out. Fellow starters Brittany Helm and Ty Felder each posted nine points.

The Blue Raiders forced 27 turnovers, 10 of which came off the hands of Frazier, and converted the ball changes into 34 points. MT also dominated in the paint, outscoring UNO 36-18.

The Lady Privateers were able to hang with the Lady Raiders early, taking a 12-10 lead on a Helm jumper at the 13:11 mark for their final advantage. Brown knocked down a pair of free throws 28 seconds later to knot the score for the third time in the early going before Lanning buried her second 3-pointer to give Middle Tennessee (26-5) the lead for good.

The five-point spurt was the beginning of a 23-5 surge over the next 10 minutes, helping the Lady Raiders push their edge to 16, 33-17, as the teams passed the three-minute mark. New Orleans then responded with nine of the next 13 points to close within 11, 37-26, and had a chance at another bucket before the half but turned the ball over with four seconds to play.

Middle Tennessee set up an in-bounds play, which saw Lymon receive the ball at three-quarters court and race towards the net. She put the ball in the hole with one tick left and was fouled. Her ensuing free throw rimmed out, leaving MT ahead 39-26 at the intermission.

Lymon nearly increased the lead to 16 within the first 30 seconds of the second half after being fouled again, this time taking a 3-pointer. She was only able to convert two of the three charity tosses, but Brown drilled her first trey at 17:35 for an 18-point cushion, 46-28.

The Blue Raider offense then turned its attention to Clark, who tallied 13 consecutive points from 13:35 to 10:52, helping MT increase its lead to 24, 62-38. During the stretch, Clark connected on three straight old-fashioned three-point plays.

Clark then scored again at 9:30 following Brown's next 3-pointer, increasing the margin to 29, 67-38.

The lead grew to over 30 on a pair of Lymon foul shots at 5:54, which came early during an 8-0 run capped by a Clark layup with 3:19 to play for an 80-43 advantage.

Only a pair of free throws by Lanning would add to MT's total down the stretch, as UNO used four charity tosses of its own to decide the final score.

Middle Tennessee will return to action in the tournament semifinals against No. 5 seed South Alabama at 12:30 p.m. Monday. The game will be broadcast live on ESPN+ and picked up in the Southeast Region by Comcast/Charter Sports Southeast (CSS).