

Blue Raiders drop NCAA thriller to Michigan State

Season comes to a close following one-point defeat

March 22, 2009 · Athletic Communications

EAST LANSING, Mich. -

Middle Tennessee led for nearly the whole game and had a missed opportunity in the final 10 seconds in falling, 60-59, to Michigan State Sunday afternoon in the First Round of the NCAA Tournament inside the Jack Breslin Student Events Center in East Lansing, Mich. The eighth-seeded Blue Raiders end their season at 28-6, while the ninth-seeded Spartans advance to Tuesday's Second Round versus No. 1-seeded Duke with a 21-10 record.

Second Team All-American pick Alysha Clark dominated the offensive scoring for both teams with a game-high 34 points to go with 10 rebounds for her 17th double-double of the season and 55th of her career and surpass the 2,000-point barrier in her career. The 34 points are also a MT tournament record, breaking Kim Webb's 33 set versus Western Kentucky in the 1985 Mideast Regional in Bowling Green, Ky.



She ends the season with 935 points, setting a single-season school record, ranking fifth all-time in NCAA history and surpassing former Lady Raiders' Amber Holt's mark of 930 set a year ago.

Clark's 27.5 points per game average tops the nation and is a new school standard, beating Holt's

27.4 ppg from 2007-08. Clark also hit both of her 3-point attempts, a single-game personal record.

The Lady Raiders could not manage another player in double figures, as Brandi Brown (nine) and Jackie Pickel (eight) were next in the scoring column.

Aisha Jefferson paced Michigan State with a double-double effort of 20 points and 10 rebounds. Kalisha Keane and Cetera Washington each chipped in double-figure outings with 13 and 12, respectively. Allyssa DeHaan, the Spartans' 6-9 center, helped limit MT in the paint with six blocked shots out of the team's 11 total.

Middle Tennessee opened the game with a 7-2 lead following a Pickel 3-pointer with 18:00 left. The home standing Michigan State crew responded with a mini 6-2 spurt to pull within one, 9-8, over the next two-and-a-half minutes but MT never let the lead slip away.

The margin would swell to a game-high 15 points, 27-12, as Clark drained the second of her two triples. Her two 3-pointers were part of a near-20 minute stretch, from 11:06 of the first half to 10:00 of the second half, in which she netted 29-straight Lady Raider points.

After the lead jumped to 15, however, the Spartans clawed back to within three, 27-24, behind a 12-0 spurt capped by treys from Keane, Jefferson and a pair of charity tosses by Keane at 4:51. Clark's layup at 4:28 stopped the surge, pushing the lead to five, a gap which would not be less the remainder of the half.

DeHaan posted the final points of the half on a layup with 36 seconds to play, closing the opening period with MT ahead, 38-32.

The Spartans recorded seven of the second half's first eight points to cut the margin to one, 40-39. Again, however, the Blue Raiders would not allow the home team to take the lead on its home court. Three-and-a-half minutes later Keane drove in for a layup, following a steal, to put Michigan State ahead for the first time, 45-44, with 13:13 remaining.

Over the next nine minutes, Middle Tennessee pushed its advantage back to seven, 57-50, on a Brown 3-pointer with 4:24 to play. The Spartans then outscored the Lady Raiders 10-2 down the stretch, reclaiming the lead it would not relinquish on a 3-pointer from Mia Johnson with 1:10 left on the first points after Clark fouled out at the 1:36 mark.

Brown brought the Blue Raiders within one and had the final chance at the end, but could not get a shot away in the final 10 seconds.

The game marked the 12th NCAA Tournament appearance in school history, dropping MT's record to 5-12 in the annual championship event. It also marked game No. 34 of the campaign, matching the program record for most in a single season.

All 11 players will return in 2009-10 for head coach Rick Insell's fifth season and will be joined by five incoming student-athletes, all hailing from the state of Tennessee.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE POST-GAME QUOTES

Forward Alysha Clark

On Allyssa DeHaan blocking the whole time...

I expected her to be on me the whole time. Coach said they would probably put her on me to counter the lack of size. I know she is 6-9 and I'm only 5-10 so she is going to get some blocked shots. You can't stop going at somebody just because they're bigger.

On Michigan State making the runs they made...

We knew they were going to have their runs. They're a good team and they didn't get here by mistake so we knew they'd have their runs. I think the mistakes we made on defense are what really hurt us. Missing match-up assignments, not getting rebounds and rushing our offense, all of those really hurt us. They took advantage of that and it hurt us.

On MSU drawing charges on purpose...

I think they did. (Aisha) Jefferson got a couple of charges on me and I think they were looking to do that. I'm pretty sure their coach stressed that to them in good defensive position to take a charge and it's my mistake for continuing to go in there with four fouls so they did a good job on that.

Guard Chelsia Lymon

On the last four minutes...

The last four minutes we kind of rushed our offense a little bit. We went away from things in our offense that were working. Then they came back and went to their power players which were (Aisha) Jefferson and (Allyssa) DeHaan. They capitalized on us making mistakes on offense.

On the final play...

The final play was set up and we ran it just like coach drew it up. Brandi Brown somehow didn't catch the ball and threw it out which made the time go by a little bit faster when she threw it out. We threw it back into her, and I think she had another chance to make a shot, but she just missed the ball.

On the height of MSU...

It didn't bother us much. We knew coming in that they were a big team. I think a lot of times, in my case, we were trying to get the ball away from them with lay-ups and we were missing them and they were blocking them. Coming in, I knew they were going to be tall but I don't think it played too much of a big difference because we've been playing teams that have been taller and bigger than us all year.

On Alysha Clark fouling out...

Coach puts us in different scenarios in practice and when she fouled out I didn't think twice about it. I knew someone else had to step up. It had been awhile since she fouled out so it was a quick adjustment and we had to find out who was going to make the big play down the stretch. We passed it to the person we wanted the ball down to.

Head Coach Rick Insell

Opening statement...

I'm very proud of the season our young ladies had. They played hard and we hate to see it end this way. Michigan State played a good, tough game and did some things to us that they had to do. They were successful and you have to give them credit. They did a very good job. I'm also proud of our young ladies for coming into this environment and playing as tough and as hard as they did.

On defensive mistakes in the second half...

They had a couple of defensive assignments and traps set on the left sideline and down in the key trying to get a cheap basket. Then it was a put back on a rebound and then the three. Anne Marie (Lanning) and Jackie (Pickel) needed to get some help on that and they gave it to their best three-point shooter. It was the first open look she had all day and she knocked it down. In games like this, you can't have breakdowns like that and we did, which was uncharacteristic of us. They took advantage of them and that's what a good team is supposed to do and they did that late. It was a heck of a time to have those breakdowns. Games like this hinge on a play or two, and you don't know if they come early or they come late and these plays came late.

On Alysha Clark's play...

I felt like she did a really good job early. To start the second half, which was uncharacteristic of us, we came out and she was facing the basket from 14 feet away and the big girl got in her head a little bit. I'd say she would have gotten in my head, too. She came out and faced the basket and that opened her up for some charges and they took a couple. There was a block coming off one of our inbound plays that I thought was questionable. I think they maybe held her there, but it could have gone either way and they called it a charge. I saw her kind of get emotional with what was going on and I thought that might be trouble down the stretch. Then she attacked the basket, which she is supposed to do, and she got the charge.

On the team's last offensive possession...

I felt like we opened Anne Marie (Lanning) up on the wing out there and she came off and made the right pass to Brandi (Brown) and then she kicked it back out and when she kicked it back out it took more time off the clock, but we didn't have any more time outs. We went back into Brandi and I think the big kid might have deflected the basketball but I'm not sure. We entered the ball high and probably shouldn't have entered the ball high, but she was a force in there. If you had to look at one thing, every time they took her out we were able to have our way. They had to keep her in and she played 33 minutes and that's more than she's been playing. You have to say that she the difference in the ball game.

On Alysha Clark's streak of 27 straight points...

Our offense is set up where we're going to enter the ball to that position whether it's Alysha or Brandi (Brown) or whomever. They make decisions off of that. Michigan State did a great job with the big kid underneath in altering her shot. They also matched up outside with our shooters. We didn't really get any open looks. I think Jackie (Pickel) got two open looks there late, and she knocked one of them down and the other one rattled. I think at that point we might have been up seven when that shot rattled. If that three goes in, we're up 10 with less than three minutes to go. So their strategy worked. We don't really look at that situation with who is getting all the points. If Alysha is scoring, we're going back to her.

On the team's three-point shooting...

I would have liked to hit a few more. Everybody on our basketball team has the green light. We may force some shots sometimes that we don't need to. A team like us that has the size that we have and we haven't got a whole lot of lack of quickness, we have to take advantage of that. The difference in the basketball game was the big kid. Anybody else they put on Clark meant she had her way. When you have the 6-9 kid in there that is making her have to alter her shot and not having to foul her and you'll able to match up outside, it shuts us down on what we want to do.

Printed on July 24, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/37934>