

Nationally-ranked Middle Tennessee opens exhibition schedule with win

Clark, Brown post double-doubles

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

No. 24 Middle Tennessee fought through a sloppy game in which it turned the ball over 26 times, but the Blue Raiders forced 33 ball changes by visiting Carson-Newman in prevailing 96-68 in the exhibition opener for both teams Monday night inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

The nationally-ranked Blue Raiders had three players reach double figures, including double-double efforts from seniors Alysha Clark and Brandi Brown. Clark poured in 23 points and added 13 rebounds, both game highs, while Brown chipped in 19 points behind six 3-pointers and contributed 11 boards in the win. Fellow senior Jackie Pickel knocked down 20 points on the strength of four triples, as she paired with Brown to hit 10 of the team's 12 long-range bombs.



Middle Tennessee's defense was up to its old antics early, as it held the Lady Eagles off the scoreboard until 17:41 and forced the visitors into four turnovers on their first six possessions. After Dominique Jackson pulled Carson-Newman within four, 13-9, with 14:44 remaining in the first half, Clark forced a backcourt steal and Pickel registered her first trey at 14:18 to push the lead back to seven. Her bucket kick-started a 27-11 run over the next seven-and-a-half minutes as the Blue Raiders increased their lead to 20, 40-20, on a Clark layup with 6:49 left.

With Lymon on the bench due to foul trouble, Carson-Newman pecked its way back into the contest, trimming the deficit to 16, 52-36, on an Ashley Kyle jumper with 1:09 as part of a mini 4-0 run by the Lady Eagles. Pickel hit another 3-pointer shortly after and freshman Kortni Jones drained another before the half as MT pushed its lead back to 20 at the break, 58-38.

Three freshmen (Icelyn Elie, Kortni Jones and Dymon Raynor) all saw action during the opening 20 minutes with another newcomer, Jamila Ajanaku, making her Blue Raider debut during the second stanza. The quartet combined for 12 points in 25 minutes of action.

As the second half opened, Middle Tennessee was able to increase its lead to 26 in the opening five minutes, as Lymon took over offensively by scoring five straight points, including an old-fashioned three-point play to jump the margin to 28, 70-42.

Brown continued to knock down shots from behind the 3-point arc and her triple at the 9:13 mark provided the Blue Raiders with their largest advantage, a 35-point cushion of 85-50. A three-quarter court steal by Clark preceded her trey. Clark then fed classmate Dana Garrett in the low block and Garrett whipped a behind-the-back, no-look pass to Pickel for an easy layup.

The lead would not drop below 26 the remainder of the game, as the back-end of a two-shot foul by Candis Clear brought Carson-Newman within 89-63 with 3:12 to play.

Kyle finished as the leading scorer for the Lady Eagles with 16 points, including a 10-of-12 effort from the foul line. Zoriah Williams posted 11 points, while Shari Buford grabbed a team-best eight caroms.

Middle Tennessee will close its exhibition slate with a 5:30 p.m. tip against Lincoln Memorial next Monday, November 9, inside the Murphy Center. The Blue Raiders begin regular-season action at 2 p.m. Sunday, November 15 at home against the UCF Knights.

Middle Tennessee Post-Game Quotes:

Head Coach Rick Insell:

Initial Observations: "We were sloppy. We did not execute our offense real well. We got out of position a lot defensively; we have to do a lot better than that. But they have a scrappy little team and they will make you do some things. One thing they do extremely well is shoot the basketball. They knocked down some early threes and we fouled too much. I want to be aggressive but I want to have some controlled aggression. There were some fouls we committed that we should not have in open court that put them on the free throw line, but with a team like ours you cannot pull the reins back on them. You have to let them have their head a little bit. Tonight, even though we fouled too much, I was not disappointed with our aggression."

On being without Chelsia for 15 minutes: "I was real pleased. I thought both (Tina Stewart, Kortni Jones) of them did real well. Tina was better defensively and Kortni did a great job running our offense. Tina got up defensively and really caused some problems and that is what she has to do. Kortni Jones is like Chelsia was when she came in. Not as quick and strong as Chelsia but sees the floor well and gets the ball to the shooters and that is why we recruited her. I liked when Kortni ball-faked to the weak side and came back to the strong side to Brandi (Brown) for the three. That is stuff you do not teach; you just have that."

On seniors playing good offense: "We did not do a good job. We had 26 turnovers and Jackie (Pickel) had eight of those. We cannot live with that. We give her a little more responsibility and freedom this year to penetrate with the ball and take the 'J' a little bit off the dribble, but we have to do a better job passing the ball. We missed Anne Marie (Lanning) a few times on a power skip that we should have caught. These are things we have to work on at practice. At times, we moved the ball fairly decent."

On cutting turnovers down: "The way we played, we may end up having more turnovers this year because we are going to try to get some of the young kids in early. I am not going to play them as a group but just like playing Kortni Jones and Icelyn (Elie) with those four older kids. I thought Dymon (Raynor) did a good job coming right in. The first time we went to her, she made a great catch and scored. We are going to have a few more turnovers playing the younger kids with the older ones."

Chelsia Lymon:

On sitting out 15 minutes in the first half: "I wanted to play smarter in the second half. I was too jumpy on defense and ran over a few people, but that is what happens when you have not played anyone for so long you just get anxious. I told the referee in the second half that I was not going to touch anybody anymore and play defense with my hands behind my back."

On the first game: "He allows us to beat up on each other. If we had this in practice, we would be in there for 10 hours, but you see what our practices look like. You saw it out there."

Brandi Brown:

Opinion on offensive performance: "We did well compared to our competition but we need to do better if we are going to play more well-rounded teams. We did well tonight."

On the difficulty of the first game: "It is a lot different than practice. We have practiced for three weeks now, but I do not think you are ever really ready for your first game. It just takes a while to get back into the flow of things."

Carson-Newman Post-Game Quotes:

Head Coach Dean Walsh:

On tonight's game: "Their pressure was a factor and our inability to find their 3-point shooters was a factor. But when you are looking at a nationally-ranked Division 1 program who has all their starters back and that is what they do and did last year to make them successful, that is going to happen. We have not really gotten our press offense in. There are some things we have to clean up, obviously, but I liked that we attacked hard. I like that we did a decent job on the boards, that we got to the line 33 times and did force 26 turnovers. There are some positives we can take out of it. I thought in the second half our intensity was even better. I do not know that we took care of the ball any better. We have to clean up the turnovers. But 11 steals means we are doing some things. And still we have got two weeks to go before the opener. I am not too disappointed. If we can score 68 points with that many turnovers tells we are going to do some scoring this year. I thought the pace was good for what we needed to do."

On MT's run: "The 3-point barrage at the end of the first half was the big difference. They got some steals and easy threes and that was a factor. In the second half we just did not take care of the ball

and they pushed it out even more. But we fought, we kept continuing to battle. We played for 40 minutes and that is all I can ask for."

On Ashley Kyle: "I thought she did a pretty good job. She was aggressive and that is what seniors should do. That is what I think some of our other leaders need to step up and do also, but again they are learning that. I think Zoriah Williams played well tonight too off the bench. I think some of our freshmen played well too. Tasha Phillips and Dominique Jackson did some good things. It is a work in progress. We will make some things happen and hope we get better with this."

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