

Blue Raiders close exhibition slate with win over Lincoln Memorial

MT uses 18-0 first half run to pull away

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

No. 24 Middle Tennessee trailed for the first time in its two exhibition games, but an 18-0 spurt catapulted the Blue Raiders back into the lead and they never looked back in securing a 94-57 triumph Monday night against Lincoln Memorial in the second exhibition game of the campaign inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Amberly O'Dell nailed a 3-pointer at 17:28 to give the visiting Lady Railsplitters a 5-4 lead. She connected on two more as part of a 9-2 run over the next minute and a half as LMU built an 11-6 cushion with 16:04 remaining in the first half.

Middle Tennessee, however, turned to its All-American to halt the run as Alysha Clark converted a layup at 15:56, which began the 18-0 streak. Triples from Jackie Pickel and

Anne Marie Lanning highlighted the surge, while Tina Stewart knocked down another shortly after the run had ended to give the Blue Raiders a 25-13 edge as the teams passed the halfway mark of the opening stanza.

MT continued to add to its lead, using seven overall treys, four by Pickel, in the first 20 minutes. Meanwhile, the Blue Raiders were disruptive on the defensive end. They forced 19 turnovers in the period. Pickel poured in the final five points to send the teams into the intermission with Middle Tennessee ahead, 50-25.



The Blue Raiders grew their margin to as high as 39, 66-27, within the opening four minutes of the second half keyed by a pair of Lanning 3-pointers. Lincoln Memorial used treys from O'Dell and Destiny Williams over the next four minutes in an attempt to claw back into the contest, but Middle Tennessee kept its distance by countering with a pair of jumpers from Dana Garrett.

Dayshalee Salaman trimmed the margin to 31, 74-43, with 8:45 left, but Kortni Jones drained a long-range bomb, hit a pair of free throws and added another triple covering the next three minutes in a personal 8-0 run pushing the lead back to 39, 82-43, at the 5:35 mark.

Clark's old-fashioned three-point play at 5:04 gave the Blue Raiders their largest advantage of the game at 42 points, 85-43. O'Dell hit her seventh and final 3-pointer for the Lady Railsplitters with 13 seconds remaining to again close the gap to 36 before freshman Icelyn Elie iced the win with a free throw with three ticks left.

O'Dell led all players with 23 points on the strength of her seven 3-pointers; however, she also turned the ball over 10 times in 38 minutes. Lincoln Memorial was forced into 37 turnovers as a ballclub.

Five Middle Tennessee players reached double figures, led by Pickel's 18 points. Clark added 16 points with a game-high 17 rebounds, while Lanning also contributed 16 points. Jones and Garrett each poured in 10 points off the bench.

The Blue Raiders will open regular-season action at 2 p.m. Sunday when they play host to defending Conference USA champion UCF inside the Murphy Center. The Knights are one of nine teams on the MT schedule that reached the postseason a year ago.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes:

Head coach Rick Insell

On exhibition games preparing the team for the season

More than anything it helped our young people. For our freshmen to be able to get out there, run the floor against some other people in front of people, it helped them more than anything. Tina (Stewart) did a better job and we got a spark from her off of the bench when I brought her in for Chelsia (Lymon).

On what was done well

I don't know that we did anything real well. There were a lot of areas I think we need to work on. Lincoln Memorial were more guard-oriented, we will not see many teams like them this year. They did not really have a legitimate post and they spread us out. I do not know that 33 (Amberly O'Dell) ever missed. We lost her a lot in transition. We were really working our press and in there hard and heavy.

On shooting percentages

We just got in a situation. Jackie (Pickel) and Anne Marie (Lanning) missed some shots they do not usually miss. We were putting some new kids in and playing without Brandi (Brown) and Emily (Queen). Dana (Garrett) played a better second half. We had a talk at halftime and I thought she came out and did a better job. She was on the boards, got her hands on a ball or two and I was pleased about her play in the second half.

If Brandi will return Sunday

Absolutely and Emily (Queen) will start working with the team Thursday. We could have played Brandi (Brown) tonight, if we would have been in tournaments, but Dr. (Tom) Johns, (athletic trainer) Alison (Ness) and I thought a few more days would help her ankle.

On Emily playing Sunday

I do not anticipate her getting any time Sunday, but I will dress and have her out there. She wanted to play tonight, but that is fools gold. Her knee is healed on the outside but is still healing on the inside.

On Kortni and Tina's performance

I liked what I saw out of Tina (Stewart) and Kortni (Jones). And I really liked what I saw early out of Dymon (Raynor), but then she missed some chip shots. A lot of her shots rolled around the rim and at least three of those shots were in. She should have gone to the boards a little harder. We have to get more than four rebounds out of her. I think that is just inexperience.

On Dymon's charges

We have not taken charges all year, so that was big. For a freshman to stand there and take two charges is big. That fired up the other girls too. On new player appearances on Sunday You will see Kortni and Dymon. Of the freshmen we have, you will see both of them sometime during the game.

Players Jackie Pickel and Alysha Clark

On where the team is going into the season opener

Clark: We are definitely a lot better than we were last week. We are a little bit better defensively and tonight we played more. Last week we had a hard time of executing our offense and were so worried about where we needed to be and running our plays that we forgot to just play. Tonight we did a lot of sharing the basketball. We need to do a better job of communicating and we got lost a lot of times with this team. With the schedule we have, we cannot do that. We are starting right off with really good teams and we have to step up to the challenge.

On the team being a work in progress

Clark: Even though we have been together, with everybody developing over the summer and getting better, we have each brought something new to the game again this year. So, we still have to learn each other a little bit more. It is not as much of a work in progress as you would think because we have all been here long enough that we know what to do.

On shot opportunities

Pickel: I know when we play better opponents they are not going to give me 21 shot attempts, especially 14 from the 3-point line, but if they do, I have to be ready to knock more down than I did tonight. It is kind of frustrating because we have worked on so many things in the off-season. With the new girls in there we are trying to see what they can do, but if I am wide open, I have to shoot it.

On what the shooting percentage should be

Pickel: From 3-point, as a team, we should shoot within the 40 percentile. As much as we shoot in and out of practice, we should be shooting in the 40 percent range. That is my individual goal.

On the mood of the locker room as the season opens

Pickel: We are ready for it. You cannot take anything lightly. Even with these exhibition games, we had scouting reports and talked about what their players were going to do because you cannot just

look ahead to anybody. Especially with our out of conference schedule and the strength of it, of course the Tennessee game is being talked about, but we have three games before that we have to focus on.

On preparation after pre-season ranking

Clark: This is what we wanted. We wanted to one of the top programs in the nation and Coach Insell said last year he wanted to be in the Top 25 and move our way up. As a player, you do not really pay much attention to it right now, but in the back of your mind, you know you have to step up to the plate, and defend what you have been working for this whole time.

Lincoln Memorial Postgame Quotes:

Head coach Stephanie Smith:

On the game

We turned the ball over 37 times and you are not going to beat many teams when you do that. MT is a great team and ranked in the Top 25 for a reason and they deserve that. I am glad we had a chance to come and play a team as physical and smart as they are. Obviously, we saw a lot of weaknesses that we have. We have to take care of the ball. When we did run our offense tonight, we got some points, but we do have some things we can improve on.

On Williams and O'Dell

Amberly O'Dell is a pure shooter. She is an Indiana kid who really knows the game. She did a great job offensively but she needs to work on her ball handling. She had 10 turnovers tonight. Destiny Williams is a JuCo transfer who will be a good point guard for us. Our team basically just started playing together a few months ago. So I think once we kind of jell together, we will be a team that will give the others in our league a run for their money.

On taking something from tonight into the season

Tonight MT played with a lot of emotion and were really intense. We have to learn to be intense for 40 minutes as well. There were times tonight when we were intense, and others when we took breaks or plays off and you cannot do that.

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