Early period runs and turnovers spark Blue Raiders to win

Middle Tennessee forces 32 turnovers in victory

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - An 11-0 run to start the game and a 16-2 spurt to open the second half coupled with 32 forced turnovers led the Middle Tennessee women's basketball team to a 76-39 triumph Saturday evening over in-state foe Tennessee Tech inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The Blue Raiders opened the dominance early and never looking back in earning their fifth straight win in the series and second consecutive of at least 35 points.

Redshirt senior All-American Alysha Clark finished with game-high tying 20 points and four assists to go along with her nine rebounds in just 33 minutes, falling just short of her fifth double-double to begin the campaign. Classmate and fellow Preseason All-Sun Belt First Team honoree Brandi Brown also poured in 20 points, including a team-best two 3-pointers and a 6-of-6 effort from the charity stripe.

Junior Emily Queen made her first start of the season and chipped in eight points, while hauling in eight boards as Middle Tennessee (3-2) controlled the glass with a 41-37 advantage.

Kellie Cook paced the Golden Eagles with 13 points, while Tacarra Hayes added 10 on just 2-of-10 from the field. Haley Ervin and Katy Cooke each grabbed a team-best six rebounds.

The Blue Raiders forced a season-high 32 turnovers, while committing only 13 themselves. Among the 32 turnovers were a shot clock violation, three-second call and a pair of backcourt infractions.

Middle Tennessee raced out to an 11-0 lead after winning the tip, as five different players scored, including Anne Marie Lanning hitting a pair of foul shots at 15:03 after a technical was assessed to the Tennessee Tech (1-4) bench.

The Golden Eagles netted their first points on a pair of Hayes charity tosses at 11:05, but it was not until Kellie Cook registered a triple at 8:56 that the visitors posted their first field goal. Her trey trimmed the deficit to nine, 16-7, and that would be the closest margin the remainder of the game.

The first half lead swelled to as high as 19, 28-9, on a pair of Brown free throws with 5:32 remaining, as the Blue Raiders dominated the paint in the opening 20 minutes with a 12-0 edge and took a 32-16 lead into the break.

Again, five different MT players scored in the second-half opening 16-2 surge through the first six minutes, as Cook tallied Tennessee Tech's lone bucket at 16:54. The advantage continued to grow, reaching a high of 40 on a pair of occasions, the first coming at 5:13 when freshman Dymon Raynor received a pass from Queen to make it 72-32.

The Blue Raiders continued to substitute to get their younger players experience and freshman Icelyn Elie tallied her first collegiate point on the back end of a two-shot foul with 2:15 left.

Middle Tennessee finished with a 34-12 advantage on points in the paint and 29-11 when scoring off turnovers.

The Blue Raiders will return to action at 6 p.m. (CST) Thursday when they travel to Cincinnati, Ohio, to face No. 9/10 Xavier. The two teams have met five times over the years with Middle Tennessee owning a 3-2 lead in the series, including wins in each of the last three meetings.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Rick Insell:

Opening Comments
We played better tonight. We really cut down on our turnovers. We have got to do a better job with that. It is something we really emphasized before we came out here tonight. Thirteen turnovers is not terrible. Tennessee Tech is a good team that will win some games. I was really proud of the turnovers.

Emily Queen getting eight rebounds was big. That really freed up Brandi (Brown). We have a lot of kids who can play. We had a good rotation tonight.

On rebounds:
We were down at halftime in rebounds. It was something we talked about in there. We out rebounded LSU, we rebounded with Tennessee, and were not out-rebounding tonight. We talked about that and the way we played defense. I thought we played good defense tonight. They shot 28 free throws and we have got to quit reaching, but some of those were just putting a body against them. We did well trapping the ball.

On freshman Dymon Raynor:
Dymon did a good job. She did well going after the ball. I want her to get more aggressive on the boards and finish better. She impressed me. She is fine and playing tough.

On reserve point guards:
They did good. They had couple of turnovers, but one is a freshman and the other is sophomore with not much playing time.

On 3-point shooting:
I am not concerned a bit. I am concerned if they quit shooting. We will hit them when it counts.

On the next three games:
We have a big road trip ahead of us with Xavier, Louisville and South Dakota State. Three teams that are ranked and were all in the in NCAA Tournament last year.

Xavier is ranked in the Top 10. I doubt anyone in the country plays three Top 10 teams. I am proud of the girls. They will do well. They are fired up for it.

Tennessee Tech Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Sytia Messer:

On Alysha Clark:
Clark continued to do the things that she has done, and carried her team tonight, with 20 points and nine rebounds.

On foul trouble:
I was concerned. (Jackie) Pickel was shooting well and we thought about going to a zone, (but we did not) and I told our kids to always have a body on her, and that resulted in our 27 fouls.

On Tech's hustle and scrappy play:
That is going to be the trademark of our team. Our kids played hard and right now, I only have freshmen and sophomores. We are learning how to win, how to finish games, how to compete.

On MT's pressure defense the whole game:
I wasn't surprised at all. I knew they were going to press us for 40 minutes. I hope our kids learned from this, that it is not a good feeling to lose. And if our kids learned from that, and return the favor a year from now, we will be just fine.

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