Brown reaches 1,000-point barrier; Pickel, Stewart net career highs

Four starters score in double figures

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Four starters tallied double-figure points, led by career highs from Jackie Pickel and Tina Stewart, and Brandi Brown joined the 1,000-point club, as the Middle Tennessee women's basketball team earned a 90-58 victory Wednesday night over FIU inside the Murphy Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Pickel, who just 10 days ago set a new career high with 27 points against Louisiana, topped the 30-point plateau for the first time with a game-best 34 points on 13-of-20 field goals, including 6-of-10 from behind the 3-point arc. Her six triples give her 205 in her career, becoming only the fourth player in school history to exceed 200 career 3-pointers. They move her within one of third-place Kristi Brown on the all-time list. Pickel also added five steals and five rebounds in 39 minutes.

Stewart garnered her second career start and responded with a career-high 12 points on 5-of-9 from the floor. She tied for second on the team with four steals, among 19 the Blue Raiders swiped overall.

However, the highlight of the night came at 4:05 of the first half when Brown hit a turnaround jumper in the lane for her 1,000th career point. She becomes the 22nd member of the elite club at Middle Tennessee (10-5, 5-1 Sun Belt) and the second Blue Raider to reach the milestone this season, joining Alysha Clark. Brown finished with 10 points and five rebounds, hitting one-half of her 10 field goal attempts.

Clark, who earlier in the day was tabbed as a Midseason Wooden Award candidate, contributed with her ninth double-double of the season, 26th as a Blue Raider and 64th overall in her career. She finished with 22 points and a game-best 13 rebounds, including eight on the offensive glass. The All-American also added a game-high six assists and converted 5-of-6 free throws to move into 15th place on the school's all-time scoring chart with 1,242 points.

Michelle Gonzalez led the Golden Panthers with 21 points, tallying a team-best three 3-pointers, while Marquita Adley chipped in 10 points. Adley matched Elisa Carey for team-high honors with eight boards.

After the game started slow through the early stages, with FIU (7-11, 2-5 Sun Belt) jumping out to a 10-5 lead with 12:43 to play following a Fanni Hutlassa triple, Pickel answered with her first 3-pointer to start a 9-0 run. The spurt also included another trey from Pickel and one by Chelsia Lymon, to give MT the lead for good, 14-10, with 10:08 left.

Over the course of the next four minutes, the Blue Raiders increased their margin to 13, 29-16, following Pickel's only trip to the foul line. Consecutive layups from Clark and Brown pushed the edge to 17, 35-18, just two minutes later. The Golden Panthers would trim the deficit back to 13 twice in the final two minutes; however, Dymon Raynor intercepted a pass and Pickel drained a 3-pointer just before the half ended to send Middle Tennessee into the break ahead, 46-30.

The Blue Raider momentum carried over to the second half, as the lead swelled to 27 on a Brown layup with 12:40 remaining for a 66-39 cushion. Back-to-back 3-pointers from Pickel halfway through the stanza were part of an 8-0 run, which saw Middle Tennessee increase the gap to 33, 79-46, with 10:01 left.

The Blue Raiders were holding the Golden Panthers without a field goal during the three-minute stretch until Carey ended the drought with a jumper at 7:52 to pull the visitors within 32, 81-49. The lead never dipped below 28 the rest of the way, while Stewart's jumper with 1:59 gave MT its largest advantage at 35, 90-55, before FIU recorded the final three points of the contest.

Middle Tennessee scored a season-high 49 points off turnovers, forcing 31 Golden Panther miscues.

The Blue Raiders will return to action at 2 p.m. Saturday when they play host to Florida Atlantic inside the Murphy Center.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Quotes
Head Coach Rick Insell

On points from forced turnovers
We are going to give up a few chip shots in the backside when we press like we did tonight. We felt, the way (Florida) International played, that we had to get in them. If we allowed them to come down the floor, they are so strong inside we would pause and possibly put Brandi and Alysha in foul trouble. They were very coachable and I am very proud of them.

On the change of tempo from the first five minutes to the last five
Coming off the Little Rock game we were questioning ourselves. The coaching staff was not

questioning, but they were. Jackie hit a basket and we got a steal or two and all of a sudden we were re-energized. Tina got a little more comfortable up front.

On strategic changes when Tina is in the game
She is just so quick off of the dribble. If we can get Tina picking the shooters up the way she goes to the basket, that is going to make us more effective and that is what we have been working on in practice. Tina can shoot the basketball. We do not want her to be primary, but if they back off of her, she is going to take the shot.

On the changing mindset with Emily out for the season
It changes the mindset of the younger girls. They had Emily to look at going in. Emily was starting and we were rotating Brandi, Emily and Alysha. Now they know there is not any Emily to rotate. We are going to have to reset and get Dymon Raynor or Icelyn Elie. That is the bottom line. They cannot go in and wonder what is going on. They have got to hustle down the floor, pick up their defense and go to the boards hard.

On coaching against Cindy Russo
She is a very good basketball coach. I mean, good gracious, you do not luck into winning 600 basketball games. She is a very, very good basketball coach and I do respect her highly. I respect her as highly as anybody else in this conference. You have got a lot of challenges there at FIU and she overcomes them and brings in a great team.

Jackie Pickel

On the realization of scoring 34 points
Chelsia said something to me down at the baseline with three minutes to go about getting up to 40 and I just told her to hush. But I did not have a clue until she told me. That is when I realized.

On relying on the defense to get the tempo going
That is what we have been working on the past few days. Sunday and Monday we did not touch the ball offensively. It was all defense and we had to run every time we did not make a stop and that is what he was harping on before the game. Anytime we start slow offensively, we have got to get something going defensively.

On coming off of a tough loss
Confidence is one of the things our team needs to work on. We either have great confidence because we are playing great or everyone is down if we are having a bad game. We have got to work on, if we do have a bad game like we did against UALR, doing other things than just shooting. We realize that now.

Alysha Clark

On the defense getting the offense going
Down at Little Rock, we kind of just watched them play and did not really play defense. That is something we have been working on and coach said what we did down there is not Lady Raider basketball. We usually dictate how our game goes and with our defense. So we really wanted to come out here tonight and play our basketball.

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