

Balanced attack lifts Blue Raiders to fourth-straight win over Lady Toppers

Three players score 20+; Clark has another double-double

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. -

Middle Tennessee used a balanced scoring attack with four players in double figures, including three registering at least 20 points, to earn its fourth-straight victory over Western Kentucky by an 88-63 decision Sunday afternoon inside E.A. Diddle Arena in Bowling Green, Ky. Only six Blue Raiders stepped onto the floor, enabling MT to sweep the regular-season series for the second-straight campaign behind a 53.6 percent performance from the floor.

The game started back-and-forth with neither team taking a sizeable advantage, though LaTeira Owens hit consecutive buckets to put the Lady Toppers ahead, 8-7, seven minutes into the contest. However, the Blue Raiders responded with a 7-0 spurt, featuring a 3-pointer by Anne Marie Lanning, to force WKU to call a timeout after a 14-8 edge.



Brandi Brown hit back-to-back jumpers and Alysha Clark added another to offset a triple by Kenzie Rich and layup from Amy McNear to take a 20-17 lead with 8:44 to play. Jackie Pickel intercepted a pass in the backcourt and raced to the other end for a layup to push the margin five, 22-17, at the under-eight minute media timeout.

Lashay Davis hit a pair of free throws on the back-end of the timeout to pull the Lady Toppers within

three, but Middle Tennessee (13-5, 8-1 Sun Belt) answered with another run, this time a 10-2 streak, over the next four minutes to increase its lead to double digits, 32-21, with 3:41 to go.

McNear then took control near the end of the period, scoring six of Western Kentucky's final 10 points, including a jumper from the foul line extended as time expired, while Clark hit a pair of field goals and Brown drained a 3-pointer at 2:28, to send the Blue Raiders into the locker room ahead, 39-31.

McNear continued her momentum by tallying the opening basket of the second half, but Middle Tennessee used a 9-0 spurt to widen the margin once again. The Blue Raiders kept pushing on the offensive end, as Pickel lit up the hoop from long range twice and Lanning added another from behind the arc over the next five minutes, while Brown went to work inside the paint, for a 67-52 lead with 7:05 remaining.

Western Kentucky (11-8, 5-3 Sun Belt) managed just five free throws and a pair of McNear baskets over the same timeframe. She converted another layup, then Pickel posted five of the next seven points on a 3-pointer and jumper which sandwiched a pair of free throws apiece by McNear and Chelsia Lymon. Clark added a charity toss and Brown again connected on a layup as part of a 10-2 run.

A technical foul was then whistled on the Lady Topper bench with 3:45 left. Brown calmly sank both free throws, extending the margin to 23, 79-56.

After Davis trimmed the deficit to 21, 81-60, with 2:45 to go, the Blue Raiders scored the next seven points with Clark's layup at 1:07 being the only field goal, jumping the lead to a game-high 28, 88-60, with under a minute to play. Davis hit a 3-pointer with 30 seconds on the clock to decide the final score before Middle Tennessee ran out the clock to the end the game.

McNear paced WKU with 23 points on 10-of-17, while Davis chipped in 14, including a team-high two 3-pointers. The pair connected on 14-of-26 from the field, while the rest of the Lady Toppers converted only 10-of-33.

Clark led all players with a double-double of 25 points and 15 rebounds, her 11th of the season, 28th as a Blue Raider and 66th overall in her career. The 66 double-doubles move her into a tie for 10th on the NCAA all-time list with Tulsa's Jillian Robbins (2004-07). The All-American and reigning Sun Belt Player of the Week has now scored in double figures in 42 straight games and has reached the plateau in 102-of-110 overall games in her career.

Brown finished with 24 points, including 8-of-8 from the foul line, while Pickel contributed 21. She tied Lanning for game-high honors with three treys.

Middle Tennessee had 20 assists on its 30 field goals, which included Lanning and Brown each with six and Clark with five. Pickel swiped a game-best three steals.

Kortni Jones was the only player to come off the bench, seeing the floor for eight minutes during the first half in relief of Lymon. Jones tallied a pair of assists in her limited action.

The Blue Raiders will return to action when they open a three-game homestand at 7 p.m. Wednesday against New Orleans inside the Murphy Center. Middle Tennessee captured a 102-57

triumph against the Lady Privateers in the two teams' prior meeting this season, December 30, in New Orleans.

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