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Blue Raiders start strong to finish off Lady Jags

Clark posts 68th career double-double with 34 points, 11 rebounds

Athletic Communications

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MOBILE, Ala. - All-American [Alysha Clark](#) bounced back with her first double-double in three games and the other Blue Raider starters played all-around solid games, as Middle Tennessee earned a 100-52 victory at South Alabama in Sun Belt women's basketball action Saturday afternoon inside the Mitchell Center in Mobile, Ala.

Clark's double-double of 34 points and 11 rebounds led all players in both categories, while tying the arena record for individual points. It marks her 68th career double-double, moving her into a tie for seventh on the NCAA's all-time list. The Lowe's Senior CLASS Award finalist and First Team Academic All-District IV selection converted 12-of-20 field goals, including a career-high three 3-pointers, to go along with 7-of-8 free throws, four assists, two steals and a blocked shot in 34 minutes.

The Blue Raiders hit 17 triples as a team, setting a Mitchell Center standard, connecting on one-half of its attempts. South Alabama, who ranked second in the league behind MT in 3-pointers per game, was held to a trio on 18 attempts.

Fellow First Team Academic All-District honoree [Brandi Brown](#) drained four treys for 18 points, matching senior [Jackie Pickel](#)'s team-high total from behind the arc. Pickel surpassed the 900-point barrier in career, adding 16 points with five assists and a game-best four steals, one more than the Lady Jags' team total.

Senior point guard [Chelsia Lymon](#) contributed eight points and a career-best eight rebounds, ranking second among the Blue Raiders. She also dished a team-high six assists, one short of South Alabama's total.

Junior [Anne Marie Lanning](#) hit three triples as part of her 11-point effort, while senior [Dana Garrett](#) came off the bench to chip in seven points and seven rebounds, including five on the offensive glass, in 19 minutes.

The Blue Raiders sprinted out to a 9-0 advantage, capped by a Pickel 3-pointer at 16:26, to take the early lead. The blitzing start continued over the next three minutes, as Clark converted her third layup and Lymon added a pair of triples to push the margin to 14, 19-5, with 13:48 left.

The offense kept knocking down buckets, as Pickel added a pair of treys and Lymon found Lanning cutting to the hoop for a wide-open layup to give Middle Tennessee (17-5, 12-1 Sun Belt) a 30-11 edge with 9:04 to go.

With the offense doing its part, the defense also went to work, holding the Lady Jags to just one field goal, a jumper by Tashley Gaines at 8:35, over a near seven-minute stretch. A series of free throws, including a pair by Garrett, and back-to-back jumpers helped increase the lead to 39-14 before Brittney Rutledge netted a baseline shot with 5:29 remaining.

South Alabama (13-11, 8-5 Sun Belt) would utilize baskets by Vanessa Simmons, Siedah Banks, Shakira Nettles and Cylenthia Kennon in an attempt to cut into the lead. Lanning drained a 3-pointer, Garrett had an old-fashioned three-point play, Clark made a pair of charity tosses and [Tina Stewart](#) drove to the hoop for a layup with the clock nearly hitting zero to send the teams into the locker rooms with MT ahead, 49-26.

Three-pointers were the story early in the second period, as Brown, Lanning and Clark combined to hit four within the first 4:10, while the Lady Jags answered with a pair of long-range bombs from Morriah Smith, as the Blue Raiders built a 63-32 advantage. Christian Shelter brought the hosts within 29, 65-36, before Middle Tennessee tallied the next 12 points. The two teams traded two free throws and a pair of jumpers over the course of three minutes.

Clark then broke the alternating points string with a trey at 6:44, the first of four straight from behind the arc before a Garrett jumper, as the Blue Raiders used a 14-0 spurt to claim a 97-42 advantage with 4:31 remaining. Clark's 3-pointer was her third of the game, surpassing her previous career high set at Michigan State in the NCAA Tournament last March.

Morriah Smith registered five-straight points for the Lady Jags before Pickel buried a jumper to pull Middle Tennessee within one of



All-American Alysha Clark posted game highs of 34 points, 11 rebounds in Saturday's win over South Alabama. ()

the century mark with 3:02 to play, 99-47. South Alabama would score the next five points again, with the Blue Raiders employing a lineup of four freshmen and a sophomore during the final 1:41. Freshman [Kortni Jones](#) hit the front-end of a two-shot foul with 30.5 seconds left to seal the victory and put Middle Tennessee in triple digits.

Jones hauled in a career-high five rebounds, while Stewart finish with five points, including the only 3-pointer made by the bench players.

Smith paced the Lady Jags with 13 points, including the team's only triples, while Banks added 10 points and a team-best six caroms.

The Blue Raiders will return to action at 7 p.m. Wednesday when they play host to Denver inside the Murphy Center in the next-to-last home contest of the season. Middle Tennessee's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) will hold a canned food drive and donate the proceeds to the Rutherford County Food Bank.

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