

Blue Raiders start strong to finish off Lady Jags

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

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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 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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