Blue Raiders lock up SBC East Division

Clark nets 36 points, grabs 19 rebounds

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TROY, Ala. - Middle Tennessee clinched the Sun Belt's East Division for the second-straight time with a 106-84 victory Wednesday night at Troy in league action inside the Trojan Arena in Troy, Ala., which was ignited by a 36-point, 19-rebound outing by All-American Alysha Clark. The Blue Raiders also sealed a top-three seed in the upcoming conference tournament, held March 6-9 in Hot Springs, Ark., with the triumph.

All five starters scored in double figures for the first time this season, as Middle Tennessee reached the century mark for the fourth time and third time in the last five games.

Three-pointers lifted the Blue Raiders early, as Brandi Brown hit her first two and Chelsia Lymon added a pair, to help MT race out to a 19-8 lead with just over five minutes elapsed in the period. Clark was also vital during the stretch, hauling in four rebounds to just three team boards for the Trojans.

Clark continued to work in the low post, hitting four of her first five shots, while also pick-pocketing Alyce Shearing in the backcourt and knocking down the ensuing uncontested layup at 13:05 pushing the lead to 14, 23-9.

After Brittnie Davis closed the margin back to a dozen with a pair of free throws, Middle Tennessee (19-5, 14-1 Sun Belt) used a 14-4 run over the next five-and-a-half minutes to take a 22-point lead, capped by five-straight Clark points. A pair of Dana Garrett charity tosses kept the advantage at 22

through the next minute, as MT built a 42-20 cushion with 6:03 remaining in the stanza.

Troy (11-14, 4-11 Sun Belt) responded with a 14-5 run of its own, covering just over five minutes, to slice into the deficit to pull within 47-34 with 1:44 to play. Shearing tallied five points and Tenia Manuel chipped in four points during the stretch. Clark would add her fourth old-fashioned three-point play of the half 18 seconds later and neither team would score again as the Blue Raiders entered the break ahead 16, 50-34.

The second half quickly turned into a 24-point Middle Tennessee edge, as a 6-0 run four minutes into the period, which was started by a 3-pointer from Lanning, put the Blue Raiders ahead, 65-41, with 15:40 to go. Lanning's second trey came nearly three minutes later, as MT built a 29-point cushion, 76-47, with exactly 13 minutes left.

Manuel single-handedly attempted to kept the Trojans in the contest, scoring all 17 of her points in the final 20 minutes, including a pair of triples. The Middle Tennessee lead reached 30 for the first time on another old-fashioned three-point play from Clark before Lymon buried another 3-pointer with 9:38 remaining for an 87-54 score.

Over the course of the next two minutes, Jackie Pickel and Brown each nailed a 3-pointer, as the Blue Raiders crossed the 90-point mark with a 93-61 lead. The long-range bombs continued to fall with Lymon adding another at 6:43 to give MT a 96-65 advantage.

Brown's only trip to the charity stripe, with 5:36 to go, place Middle Tennessee in triple digits and put the Blue Raiders in front, 100-69. Then, over the final stretch, Troy would outscore MT, 15-6, to decide the final margin.

Clark's double-double is her 14th of the season, her 31st as a Blue Raider and 69th overall in her career. She moves into sole possession of seventh on the NCAA's all-time list with the 69 career double-doubles, surpassing the 68 accumulated by UCLA's Natalie Williams from 1991-94. Three more double-doubles will give the All-American a tie for fifth. She also tallied double-digit scoring for the 48th consecutive game, including all 22 contests in which she played.

Clark also slid up three spots into ninth place on the school's all-time scoring list following her 36-point performance. Next on the chart in eighth place is current graduate assistant Krystle Horton, who amassed 1,523 points at Middle Tennessee from 2004-07. Her 19 rebounds are one shy of her season-best 20 boards at LSU back in November.

Lymon finished with 25 points, closing within 11 of the 1,000-point milestone. Pickel chipped in 15, moving her within 68 of the plateau. Brown contributed 13 and Anne Marie Lanning added a dozen. The Blue Raiders had 24 assists on 36 field goals, while also swiping 16 steals and forcing 25 Trojans turnovers.

Davis led four Troy double-figure scorers with 25 points, while Manuel and Shearing registered 17 apiece. McAppion rounded out the Trojan quartet with 16 points.

Middle Tennessee will close its home slate at 2 p.m. Sunday when it plays host to South Alabama, live on ESPN360.com and ESPN Full Court. The game will serve as the annual Pink Zone contest, in conjunction with the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) and the Blue Raiders will wear pink uniforms to help support breast cancer awareness and research. The jerseys will be

auctioned off following the game.

Also following Sunday's tilt, Middle Tennessee will hold its Senior Day festivities. Five players and two managers will be recognized for their accomplishments on and off the court.

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