

March 2, 2010

Clark, Pickel highlight Blue Raider Sun Belt selections

Middle Tennessee leads conference with three honorees

Athletic Communications

NEW ORLEANS - Middle Tennessee women's basketball came away with two of the top postseason awards given out by the league office Tuesday, as Blue Raiders [Alysha Clark](#) and [Jackie Pickel](#) were named the Sun Belt Player of the Year and Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year, respectively.

"Anytime I see our players make the all-conference team, I am happy and elated," head coach Rick Insell said. "But, at the same time, I am sad because you always have someone left off the team you think maybe deserves it, but they have not been with your team all season to see the effort that has been put in. I thought like we deserved four players and we got three. I guess I need to be happy about that.

"Alysha was the runaway for Player of the Year. I thought Jackie did a good job this year defensively and shooting the ball very consistent. Brandi was her same-old self, the 'Silent Assassin'. If you do not watch out, she is going to beat you. She has proved her worth this year too."

Additionally, Clark was tabbed First Team All-Sun Belt, a five-member squad that also featured Middle Tennessee's [Brandi Brown](#). Pickel received Second Team honors. The three All-Sun Belt Team accolades were the most by any school in the conference.

Clark captured Player of the Year honors for the second-straight season and fourth time overall in her career. Her accolade is the fourth in head coach Rick Insell's five years and the eighth overall in school history, including the Ohio Valley Conference era.

She is just the third player in NCAA history to receive four Player of the Year awards in a career, joining ULM's Eun Jung Lee in the Southland (1983-86) and Utah's Kim Smith (2003-06) in the Mountain West. Clark picked up her first two Player of the Year honors at Belmont in the Atlantic Sun in 2006 and 2007 before transferring to Middle Tennessee.

Pickel's honor marks the eighth-consecutive season in which a Blue Raider has earned the Defensive Player of the Year. During the eight-year run, six different Middle Tennessee players have been presented the award.

Joining Clark on the First Team was Brown. The pair was named First Team in the preseason, as four of the five members selected garnered postseason accolades. Brown's honor is the second of her career after she was tabbed Third Team last year.

Pickel also received the first All-Sun Belt Team nod of her career, a Second Team selection. She becomes the first Blue Raider in program history to receive Second Team honors from the Sun Belt, as the last Second Team choice came in 1999 when Bama Burrell was named to the five-member squad by the Ohio Valley.

"We have four young ladies at the 1,000-point career mark. We have a lot of momentum going right now. The girls love each other, care for each other and have passion for the game. That is what I am excited about."

North Texas' Jasmine Godbolt was recognized as the Freshman of the Year and UALR's Joe Foley was tabbed the Coach of the Year.

Middle Tennessee, with its 22-5 overall record and No. 31/30 national ranking, will enter the Sun Belt Conference Tournament at 2:15 p.m. Sunday as the No. 2 seed. It will face the winner of No. 7 FIU and No. 10 North Texas.

The Blue Raiders will be in the hunt for their sixth Sun Belt Tournament crown in the last seven years. The event, which begins Saturday and runs through Tuesday, March 9, will be held at the Summit Arena in Hot Springs, Ark., for the second-straight season.

First Team All-Sun Belt

[Alysha Clark](#) (Middle Tennessee, Sr., F)

[Brandi Brown](#) (Middle Tennessee, Sr., F)

Chastity Reed (UALR, Jr., F)

Kaetlyn Murdoch (Denver, So., F.)

Arnika Brown (WKU, Sr., F)

Second Team All-Sun Belt



Jackie Pickel was chosen as the Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year. (Bradley Lambert)

Jackie Pickel (Middle Tennessee, Sr., G)

Ebonie Jefferson (Arkansas State, Sr., G)

Britteni Rice (Denver, Jr., G.)

Elisa Carey (FIU, Jr., F)

Amy McNear (WKU, Jr., G)

Third Team All-Sun Belt

Kim Sitzmann (UALR, Sr., G)

Brittany Bowe (Florida Atlantic, Sr., G)

Brittney James (North Texas, Sr., G)

Shakira Nettles (South Alabama, Sr., G)

Donette McNair (Troy University, Jr., F)

Player of the Year: Alysha Clark (Middle Tennessee, Sr., F)

Defensive Player of the Year: Jackie Pickel (Middle Tennessee, Sr., G)

Freshman of the Year: Jasmine Godbolt (North Texas, Fr., F)

Coach of the Year: Joe Foley, UALR

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