

# Clark powers Blue Raiders into championship

## Middle Tennessee advances to eighth-straight title game

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**HOT SPRINGS, Ark.** - All-American and Sun Belt Player of the Year Alysha Clark once again set the league's single-game tournament scoring record, as she lifted No. 2 seed Middle Tennessee past rival and No. 3 seed Western Kentucky, 76-63, in Sun Belt Tournament semifinal action Monday afternoon inside the Summit Arena in Hot Springs, Ark. The win, completing a three-game season sweep over WKU, vaults the Blue Raiders into the championship game for the eighth consecutive season, where they will face top-seed UALR at 1 p.m. on ESPNU.

Clark eclipsed a four-year old Sun Belt single-game scoring mark in Sunday's quarterfinal victory over North Texas, only to see the record fall earlier in the day Monday when UALR's Chastity Reed poured in 41 points in the Trojans' 73-43 triumph over No. 12 New Orleans in the other semifinal.



Clark then broke Reed's two-hour long standard with a 16-of-27 effort from the floor and 11-of-14 at the foul line for 44 points, her third-highest output of the campaign. She hauled in 14 rebounds for her second consecutive double-double, 18th of the season, 35th as a Blue Raider and 73rd of her career.

The 73 double-doubles move her into sole possession of fifth place on the NCAA's all-time list. She also continued her climb on the NCAA's career scoring chart, sliding into 14th place with 2,787 points to surpass 2009 WNBA No. 1 overall draft pick and WNBA Rookie of the Year Angel

McCoughtry, who netted 2,779 points in her Louisville career.

Joining Clark in double-figure scoring were Brandi Brown and Anne Marie Lanning, who each tallied a dozen. Chelsia Lymon was the only other Middle Tennessee (24-5) player to score, finishing with eight points.

Brown grabbed a season-high nine rebounds, one shy of her career best, while Lymon's seven boards also contributed to a 38-to-35 edge on the glass for the Blue Raiders.

Lanning handed out a career-high tying eight assists, marking the second time in the last three games she has given out the amount. Middle Tennessee was credited with 19 assists on 26 field goals, helping the team to shoot 26-of-51 (51.0 percent) from the floor.

Kenzie Rich posted a team-high 20 points for the Lady Toppers, including three of the team's five 3-pointers. Amy McNear added 15 points, while Dominique Duck chipped in 10 to also give Western Kentucky (21-10) three starters in double figures. McNear registered eight of the dozen WKU assists, but it was poor first half shooting which led to the Lady Toppers' loss. Western Kentucky hit just 8-of-29 (27.6 percent) during the opening 20 minutes and could not recover.

Meanwhile, the Blue Raiders raced out to a 26-6 advantage through first 11-and-a-half minutes. Duck put the Lady Toppers out front with an early deuce, but MT responded with seven-straight points before Arnika Brown scored again for WKU nearly three minutes later.

Middle Tennessee then ripped off a 13-0 spurt, 10 of which came from Clark and capped by a Brandi Brown 3-pointer, for a 20-4 edge with 11:05 to play in the first frame. Two sets of free throws, one by Clark and the other via Lanning, started another 6-0 run as the lead was pushed to 20, 26-6, with 8:39 remaining.

Western Kentucky answered with an 11-0 surge of its own during the next five minutes, as McNear tallied six points and Vanessa Obafemi added a triple to cut the deficit to nine, 26-17, on an Arnika Brown layup. Lanning ended the drought with a 3-pointer at 3:42, helping the Blue Raiders use an 11-5 run to close the period and enter the break ahead 15, 37-22.

The second half began with the Lady Toppers quickly slicing the margin back to single digits, as Duck poured in six consecutive points for a 37-28 Middle Tennessee lead with 18:15 to go. However, during the next three minutes, the Blue Raiders countered with a 14-2 surge, featuring nine points from Clark and five by Lanning, to again push the lead back over 20 and a 51-30 score at the 15:06 mark.

Obafemi buried her second triple to halt the run and the two teams would trade baskets during the next six minutes with Brandi Brown putting MT up, 60-40, with 9:02 to play on a layup. Rich then took over, recording 12 straight WKU points and 15 of the team's next 19 to time the deficit to 10, 69-59, with 2:07 left.

The Lady Toppers would get no closer the remainder of the way, as Middle Tennessee was able to close out the victory with four of its final six points being scored by Lymon.

Tuesday's championship against UALR will be a rematch of the final from a year ago, which witnessed the Blue Raiders tallying a 74-54 win. It marks the third-straight season in which the two

teams will play in the Sun Belt Tournament. Middle Tennessee also eliminated the Trojans in the 2008 semifinal round.

ESPNU will broadcast the game nationally, as Dave Weekley serves as the play-by-play and Leslie Hill steps in as the color commentator. The contest can also be heard on the Blue Raider Network with Dick Palmer and Duane Hickey on the call.

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