

# Season ends for Middle Tennessee in heartbreaker

## All five starters tally double-figure points

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**PITTSBURGH** - No. 27/24 Middle Tennessee led for 38 minutes but could not close the door as Mississippi State rallied for a 68-64 victory Sunday in NCAA Tournament First Round action at the Petersen Events Center in Pittsburgh, Pa. The Dayton Region contest pitted the No. 10 seed Blue Raiders and No. 7 seed Bulldogs.

Middle Tennessee (25-6) placed all five starters in double figures and jumped out to a double-digit lead in both halves, including a game-high 15-point cushion at 9:11 of the first period when All-American Alysha Clark grabbed a backcourt steal and raced to the other end for a layup to make it 21-11.

The Blue Raiders had netted the game's first four points and withstood a 5-2 Mississippi State push to keep the margin at one, 6-5, with 16:17 remaining in the stanza.

Middle Tennessee responded with a 10-2 run, capped by an Anne Marie Lanning 3-pointer, forcing a MSU timeout and extending the lead to nine, 16-7, at 13:25. After the Bulldogs cut the deficit back to five, 16-11, with exactly 12 minutes to play, Clark's layup was part of a 10-0 Blue Raider surge during the next three minutes to increase the gap to the game-high 15.

The MT advantage remained in double figures at 10, 27-17, when Clark was called for her third personal foul with 4:13 left, sending her to the bench the remainder of the half. Mississippi State (20-



12) then took control, outscoring the Blue Raiders 11-3 down the stretch, featuring four points from Armelie Lumanu and four by Alexis Rack to enter the halftime with Middle Tennessee ahead, 30-28.

The Blue Raiders kept the margin at five following a Brandi Brown triple with 18:01 to play and Chelsia Lymon adding another just under two minutes later as the teams entered the first media timeout of the second stanza with MT in front, 42-37. After an icy first half, Jackie Pickel started to light up in the second period and her 3-pointer with 13:24 remaining put Middle Tennessee ahead, 47-41.

Mississippi State, however, would not go away and four-straight points, capped by a Rack trey at 11:46, cut the gap again to one, 47-46. The Blue Raiders then went back to Clark, and her layup a minute-and-a-half later ignited an 11-2 run during the next four minutes helped propel MT back in front, 58-48, with 7:48 to go.

The lead remained nine, 64-55, on another Lanning 3-pointer, but Rack countered with one of her own and scored twice more in a 9-0 Bulldog spurt to tie the game at 64-64 with 1:27 to play. Middle Tennessee was only able to manage one more shot, a layup attempt by Clark at 1:12, while Lumanu recorded the final four points for Mississippi State to seal the final score.

Chanel Mokango led the Bulldogs with 20 points and 14 rebounds, while Rack chipped in a game-best 21 points, including four 3-pointers. Lumanu added 12 points for Mississippi State.

Clark paced the Blue Raiders with 17 points and 14 rebounds for her 75th career double-double, 37th at Middle Tennessee and 20th of the season. She finishes in a tie for fourth with LSU's Sylvia Fowles on the NCAA's all-time list with 75 double-doubles, while her 37 double-doubles tie for third in school history. She netted 2,852 career points, ranking 12th in NCAA history.

Brown added 14 points, including four triples, while Lymon, Pickel and Lanning each contributed 11 points. Lymon, Pickel and Brown each hauled in five rebounds.

Senior Dana Garrett also stepped onto the floor for the final time as a Blue Raider, playing five minutes with one assist.

Mississippi State advances to Second Round action Tuesday to face No. 2 seed and eighth-ranked Ohio State at 6 p.m. Central on ESPN2.

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