

Mocs win 14th SoCon Title

Written by Chandler Carver
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The Chattanooga Lady Mocs won their 14th Southern Conference Women's Basketball Championship on Monday, defeating Davidson 64-63 in ExploreAsheville.com Arena at U.S. Cellular Center. UTC is now 14-0 all-time in league title tilts with its first crown since 2010. This one went down to the final horn.

Kayla Christopher capped the come-from-behind triumph in the Lady Mocs' final possession. With time ticking down, she followed a Dewart put-back miss with a follow of her own to give UTC a 64-63 lead with 8.2 seconds to play. Davidson went to Laura Murray, who scored a game-high 22 points. She drove left in front of her bench to the baseline, pulled up for the shot but it missed and went into the waiting hands of Christopher at the buzzer. Taylor Hall scored 17 of her 19 points in the second half, leading the Lady Mocs' comeback charge from 11 points down.

Ashlen Dewart added 15 points, 12 rebounds and three steals to earn SoCon Tournament Most Outstanding Player honors. Murray went 4-for-5 from 3-point range, accumulating her 22 on the day. Sophia Aleksandravicius added 18 points, 11 boards and four blocks. Barbara Sitton chipped in 10 rebounds of her own. The Wildcats spent little time adding to their first-half lead. Aleksandravicius' layup at 19:14 put her team up 11, 36-25, for its largest lead of the game. Sarah Davis made it 11 again, 38-27, with two free throws at 18:39.

Chattanooga continued to battle. Hall's jumper at 14:44 cut the margin to four, 40-36, one of many big plays by the junior forward. Davidson did not wilt under pressure. Murray drained a 3 just eight seconds later and Aleksandravicius pushed the lead back to seven, 45-38, with two free throws at 13:59. Dewart and Christopher scored on baskets within 10 seconds of each other to draw UTC back within three, 45-42, at 12:22. For the longest stretch, it appeared Davidson would keep the Lady Mocs at bay. Down three, 54-51, Hall built on her heroic second-half resume.

She drained a trey at 6:13 to knot the score at 54. In its first title game since 1999, Davidson was stoic against the run. Murray and Katrin Chiemeka went 4-for-4 at the charity stripe on the next two possessions to get the lead back to four, 58-54. Dewart followed with four straight to even it at 58-all at 3:34. The Wildcats took control from there, or more to the point, Murray dominated the next two trips into the offensive zone. She drained her fourth 3 and then scored on a layup at 2:13 for the 63-58 lead, putting Chattanooga on edge. But the Lady Mocs were up to the challenge. Two free throws from Hall at 1:57 got the start.

She scored on a layup with 43 seconds remaining to make it a one-point game, 63-62. After forcing a turnover, SoCon Coach of the Year Wes Moore drew up a quick strike. Kylie Lambert broke free on a strong cut to the basket but had her layup blocked on a brilliant play by Jasmine Calin with 17.6 seconds to go. That set up Christopher's game-winning play. The Lady Mocs had to overcome a hot-shooting night for Davidson, which hit 53.7 percent (22-for-41) from the field and 45.5 percent (5-for-11) from 3-point range. Chattanooga forced 19 Wildcats turnovers, yielding just six of its own. UTC also held a 23-6 advantage on second-chance points, none bigger than the final two from Christopher.

Davidson turned around a slow start in the first half. Trailing by six early, it went on a 12-2 run to take an 18-14 lead on an Aleksandravicius layup at 7:11. The Lady Mocs evened the slate

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quickly, 18-18, with baskets by Tatiana Jackson and Dewart, the latter coming with 6:12 to go until half. The Wildcats went on another burst, outscoring UTC 14-4 over the next five minutes. Another Aleksandravicius layup at 1:15 made it a 10-point contest, 32-22. Lambert dropped a 3-pointer in the Lady Mocs' final possession with 34 seconds remaining for the 32-25 halftime score.

Dewart was named Most Outstanding Player for the tourney. She was joined on the first-team all-tournament squad by Hall, Murray, Aleksandravicius and Raven Gary (Appalachian State). Alex Black (UTC), Anna Freeman (App State), Kelsey Evans (Elon), Meredyth Frye (Georgia Southern) and Taylor Reece (Samford) made the second team. Chattanooga learns its NCAA tournament destination Monday, March 18. The selection show on ESPN airs at 7 p.m.

Photo Courtesy: Ashlen Dewart, SoCon Athletics