Middle Tennessee-SEMO Game Preview

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A battered and weary Middle Tennessee football team returns to Murfreesboro for its home opener Saturday with one thing and one thing only on its mind -- get a win. "We have a fragile football team right now that is hungry for a win," head coach Andy McCollum said. "We need a win," he added. "We need to come home and get better. It's been a tough three weeks on the road." The 0-and-3 Blue Raiders come off an emotional loss to Kentucky that produced the suspension of four players -- two from each team. Defensive linemen Jerry Vanderpool and Devarick Scandrett were ejected from the second half of the Saturday's game after a fight broke out at mid-field as the first half ended. The suspension is scheduled to last through the first half of this Saturday's game against Southeast Missouri. However, McCollum has appealed on behalf of Vanderpool to reinstate the red shirt-sophomore as McCollum feels he was wrongly ejected. "All the film that we have and everything that we've got," McCollum said, "I have nothing on there that shows what he did wrong. I just want the right thing done and the right thing was not to kick Vanderpool out. He gets a black eye out of it and all he did was do his job. I just want it seen on film and I want him reinstated for this game." McCollum has sent film of the game to both the SEC and SBC officials but is not sure when the appeals process will run its course. "I don't want to sit here and have people across the country think that our kids have done this or done that," McCollum added, "because that's the way it's always portrayed. Our kid did exactly what he was taught." While emotions still run high with disappointment from the 0-and-3 run through the SEC, the goals set out at the beginning of the year are still obtainable and it all begins this week against SEMO. "We still have all of our goals ahead of us," quarterback Andrico Hines said. "We still have an opportunity to win the Sun Belt and go to a bowl game. Our season is far from over." To obtain those goals, however, the Blue Raiders must come out of the gates a little quicker. Middle has been outscored 53 to nothing in the first quarter this season. "Against good teams, you can't slip up," linebacker Randy Arnold said. "You have to play all four quarters and can't make mistakes." The Blue Raiders secondary that gave up more than 300 yards to Kentucky will be tested once again as SEMO brings with them the OVCs leading receiver in Willie Ponder. The senior from Tulsa, Ok., is averaging 118.75 yards a game and has visited the end

zone five times already this season. The man getting the ball to Ponder is Jack Tomco, who is second in the OVC at his respective position. "They have a good passing game and like to spread you out," Arnold said. "They also have a good quarterback and good balance." Middle Tennessee leads the all-time series against their former conference foe 9-1 and has reeled off 11 straight wins at Floyd Stadium. Kickoff is set for 6 p.m. , and the game is featured as Faith and Family Night and Salute to the Veterans. **GAMEDAY ACTIVITIES**

- Tailgating Areas: Greenland Drive, Raider Row, and the all new Old Main Circle
- FREE Children's Play Areas: Greenland Lot and Old Main Circle
- Gospel Music Showcase at 4:00 PM on the WFCM state near the alumni center
- LIVE MUSIC in Old Main Circle featuring Trent Summer at 2:00 PM
- SMASH THE CAR WITH AGR in the Old Main Circle
- LIVE remote on the Buzz 102.9 in the Greenland Drive tailgating area
- FREE Blue Raider Posters (compliments of Daily News Journal)
- Annual salute to Veterans featuring Veterans from all service branches

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