Gee whiz!!! Blue Raiders win

Middle Tennessee improves to 3-0 in Sun Belt with 35-21 win at Louisiana-Monroe

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MONROE, La. - Freshman Desmond Gee has been one of the more productive freshmen in the Sun Belt Conference this season.

The show Gee put on against Louisiana-Monroe Saturday not only qualified as a breakout performance, but it also helped to lead the Blue Raiders to a 35-21 win at Malone Stadium. Middle Tennessee remained unbeaten in SBC play at 3-0 and improved to 4-3 overall. The Blue Raiders maintained their share of the conference lead in the victory.

Gee played a major role. The rookie tailback spent most of his time running routes Saturday and he delivered in monumental fashion. Gee became the first 100-yard receiver in the Rick Stockstill era and finished the game with six receptions for 109 yards and a 54-yard touchdown, all career highs.

It was a game in which the Blue Raiders continued to make strides and this time they proved they can come from behind on the road. Louisiana-Monroe (1-6, 0-4) led 21-14 at the half; however, the Blue Raiders' halftime adjustments were on the mark. Middle Tennessee dominated the second half, outscoring the Warhawks 21-0 in the final 30 minutes. Middle Tennessee's offensive line paved the way as the Blue Raiders piled up 215 yards rushing for the game, as well as 449 yards total offense.

Middle Tennessee's ground game was led by Eugene Gross and DeMarco McNair. Gross finished with 101 yards rushing on 21 carries and a touchdown. It was his first 100-yard rushing performance this season, while McNair had a career-high 91 yards on 18 carries and two touchdowns.

Senior quarterback Clint Marks was also outstanding in the win. He completed 19-of-24 passes for 234 yards and a pair of touchdowns. It was the 16th 200-yard game of Marks' career and helped enable Middle Tennessee to register its 21st SBC win, second-most among league members.

Middle Tennessee's first scoring drive was one of beauty as the Blue Raiders marched 84 yards in 11 plays and capped it with Jay Robinson's first career touchdown, a 7-yard grab in the back of the end zone. Colby Smith's point after staked the Blue Raiders to a 7-0 lead with 13:48 remaining in the second quarter.

The Blue Raider scoring drive was highlighted by the pass-catching skills of Desmond Gee. The freshman from Greenville, Fla., hauled in three of his career-high six receptions on the drive, including a 26-yard grab that moved Middle Tennessee to the Warhawks' 10. Marks was 6-of-6 for 78 yards on the drive.

Louisiana-Monroe followed the Blue Raider scoring drive with one of its own, a 9-play, 80-yard effort, capped by Erroll Hogan's 2-yard run. It was only the second score allowed by a Sun Belt opponent this season and ended a string of 31 consecutive drives without allowing a score.

Middle Tennessee came right back, this time using the ground game to plow its way toward a 9-play, 66-yard scoring drive. DeMarco McNair proved to be the workhorse and was rewarded for his fine running when his number was called at the goalline and he delivered with a 3-yard run. McNair rushed seven times for 41 yards on the drive.

The Warhawks tied the game on the ensuing drive when Calvin Dawson scored from the 3 to cap an 8-play, 80-yard drive. Much of Middle Tennessee's success this season has resulted from ball security; however, the Blue Raiders had three first-half turnovers and the second - a Eugene Gross fumble - proved costly. Gross' fumble occurred on a third-and-1 play from the Blue Raider 29. The Warhawks recovered and converted the miscue into points one play later when J.J. McCoy hauled in a 32-yard pass from quarterback Kinsmon Lancaster to give Louisiana-Monroe a 21-14 lead with 1:13 remaining in the first half.

The halftime break was productive for the Blue Raiders as the defense came out and held Louisiana-Monroe to four yards and forced a punt. The Middle Tennessee offense responded as the offensive line paved the way for a strong ground attack on the five-play, 51-yard drive.

All five plays were of the rushing variety and Gross capped it with a 3-yard outstretched plunge when he took off from the 2 and leaped over defenders and into the end zone for his 36th career rushing touchdown and his 37th overall.

Gee continued his breakout game on the third play of the fourth quarter when got behind the corner and hauled in a 54-yard catch from Marks in stride and took it to the end zone for his second touchdown of the game and the fourth-longest scoring play of the season.

McNair capped a strong game with his second touchdown, an 8-yard run, with 6:38 remaining in the game to put the Blue Raiders on top 35-21.

The Blue Raiders will return to action at Louisiana-Lafayette next Saturday in Lafayette, La.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE GAME NOTES

TWO WAYS: Safety Damon Nickson and cornerback Bradley Robinson played both offense and defense for the first time this season. Robinson, who entered tonight's game with one career reception, finished with a career-high two catches for 30 yards, while Nickson had none.

GEE HAS CAREER NIGHT: True freshman running back Desmond Gee, who spent most of his night lined up as a receiver, reeled in a personal-best six receptions for 109 yards, including a key 54-yard touchdown grab in the fourth quarter. Gee entered the game with just two receptions for 15 yards.

STREAK ENDS AT 30: The Middle Tennessee defense saw its impressive conference streak of scoreless possessions come to an end against UL-Monroe when the Indians scored on their third possession in the second quarter. After giving up an opening drive touchdown against FIU in the season opener, the Blue Raiders went 30 straight possessions and eight quarters of conference action before ULM scored a two-yard rushing touchdown.

MARKS CLOSING ON HOLCOMB: Senior quarterback Clint Marks moved closer to Kelly Holcomb on the all-time touchdown passing list with a scoring pass to Jay Robinson in the second quarter. It went down as the 34th touchdown pass of his career and put him alone in fourth place. The Fort Myers, FL, native needs just two more touchdown passes to tie Holcomb for third place.

MARKS GETS NO. 16: Quarterback Clint Marks recorded his 16th career 200-yard passing game when he completed 19-of-24 passes for 234 yards against Louisiana-Monroe Saturday night. Marks now needs just two more 200-yard games to tie Wes Counts for the all-time record at Middle Tennessee. In three career games against ULM, Marks has averaged 249 passing yards.

MCNAIR HAS CAREER NIGHT: Running back DeMarco McNair rushed for a career-high 91 yards and two touchdowns in Middle Tennessee's win over ULM. McNair surpassed his previous best effort of 71 yards set in 2004 on the road against Troy.

GROSS PASSES LYONS: With 100 yards on 21 carries Saturday, senior tailback Eugene Gross moved into eighth on the Middle Tennessee career rushing yards list. Gross now has 2,274 career rushing yards. He surpassed Brigham Lyons, who had 2,250 yards (1992-95).

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee is now 3-0 in conference play for the first time since 2001 ... Freshman wide receiver Jay Robinson recorded his first collegiate touchdown pass when he hauled in a 7-yard strike from Clint Marks in the second quarter. It was also just Robinson's second career reception ... QB Clint Marks made his 28th straight start under center tonight against ULM ... WR Luke Paschall made his second career start tonight ... Walk-on freshman Dustin Alley (McDonough, GA) played in his first collegiate game today when he saw action on the punt return team ... Sophomore Alex Suber made his first collegiate start tonight on defense as a member of the secondary ... LB Lonnie Clemons also made his first collegiate start tonight ... DE Erik Walden recorded his 13th career sack and the fourth of the season when he dropped Kinsmon Lancaster early in the third quarter ... Eugene Gross recorded his 36th career rushing touchdown and his 37th overall when he went in from three yards out in the third quarter ... Rick Stockstill is now 3-0

following a loss as a head coach ...

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