MT maintains lead in SBC race following win at Arkansas St.

Blue Raiders assured of first winning season since 2001

November 11, 2006 · MT Media Relations

JONESBORO, Ark. - Middle Tennessee moved one step closer to its first outright Sun Belt Conference football championship by overcoming a road obstacle and turning back defending league champion Arkansas State, 38-10, in front of 10,176 at Indian Stadium Saturday afternoon. The Blue Raiders (7-3, 6-0) led 10-3 at the half and broke the game open with 14 third-quarter points to conclude the road portion of its SBC slate with a spotless 4-0 ledger, marking the first time Middle Tennessee has won four road games since 1994. Coincidentally, that also was the last season the Blue Raiders participated in postseason play. With the win against Arkansas State (5-5, 3-2), Middle Tennessee assured itself of the first winning season since 2001 and the seven wins also are the most for a Blue Raider team since 2001 when the squad registered eight wins. The seven wins under head coach Rick Stockstill also represent the most for a Blue Raider first-year head coach since Charles "Bubber" Murphy went 9-1 in 1947. Middle Tennessee's defense once again was a major player in the outcome of the game. In fact, it was cornerback Bradley Robinson's third-quarter heroics that helped the Blue Raiders separate themselves from the Indians. Trailing 10-3, Arkansas State faced third-and-6 from the Blue Raider 15 when Robinson stepped in front of a Corey Leonard pass and took it 88 yards for the momentum changing score. Robinson's first career touchdown also was the fourth-longest interception return for a touchdown in school history and

staked the Blue Raiders to a 17-3 advantage with 8:48 remaining. Middle Tennessee's staunch defense set up the score that proved to be the dagger one possession later when Trevor Jenkins sacked Leonard for a 10-yard loss on a fourth-and-9 play at the Blue Raider 35. Seven plays later, Desmond Gee capped a 56-yard drive with a 7-yard touchdown run and Colby Smith's point after provided a 24-3 cushion at the 2:49 mark of the third stanza. Any lingering thoughts of an Arkansas State comeback were laid to rest when DeMarco McNair scored from 5 yards out. Smith's point after increased the advantage to 31-3 with 7:30 remaining. Special teams play helped set up the first Blue Raider touchdown. Arkansas State attempted a bit of trickery on a fake punt from its 36 on fourth-and-7. Reggie Doucet sniffed out the play after just a three-yard gain and the Blue Raiders took over on downs at the 39. Gross scored from the 1 with 7:51 remaining in the first quarter to give the Blue Raiders a 7-0 lead they wouldn't relinquish. Smith's 29-yard field goal on Middle Tennessee's third offensive possession increased the lead to 10-3 before the Indians tacked on a field goal with less than five minutes remaining in the half. Arkansas State scored its first touchdown in three games late in the fourth quarter; however, the Blue Raiders quickly answered when McNair broke loose for a 48-yard touchdown run. Smith's point after put the exclamation point on a 37-10 triumph. The Blue Raiders step out of conference play next weekend when they hit the road to face South Carolina. **ROBINSON MAKES BIG INT:** Junior Bradley Robinson's ninth career interception came at an opportune time for the Blue Raiders against ASU. Robinson stepped in front of a Corey Leonard pass and returned it 88 yards for his first collegiate touchdown and stopped what looked to be a sure Indian scoring drive. The return went down as the fourth longest in school history and the yardage went down as the fifth most for a single-game. **NUMBER NINE:** Bradley Robinson's third quarter interception was the ninth of his career and the second of the season. The Duncan, S.C., native went the first eight games of the season without an interception and now has registered a pick in back-to-back games. Robinson now stands just one interception away from jumping into the career top ten list at MT. With his next interception, Robinson will tie five others for sixth place. **WALDEN SETS SACK RECORD:** Junior Erik Walden became the all-time sack leader at Middle Tennessee when he dropped ASU quarterback Corey Leonard on back-to-back plays in the fourth quarter to run his career total to 16. Walden surpassed the previous record of 15 set by Anthony McCord (1993-96) and ran his season total to seven which ties the single-season mark set by Anthony Hicks back in 1996. **WIN NO. 500:** Tonight's win over Arkansas State was the 500th for the Middle Tennessee program during its 92 seasons of football. The Blue Raiders are now 500-355-28. **PERFECT ON THE ROAD:** The win at Arkansas State made the Blue Raiders' Sun Belt Conference road record a perfect 4-0 in 2006. The last time Middle Tennessee won four road games in a single-season was 1994, which was also the last time the Blue Raiders played a postseason game. **NO. 40:** Senior Eugene Gross registered the 40th rushing touchdown of his career when he plunged in from 1-yard out in the first quarter against Arkansas State. Gross, who is third on the all-time rushing touchdowns list, needs four more to tie Joe Campbell for second place. Overall, Gross has 41 touchdowns and needs two more to tie Kippy Bayless for third on the total touchdowns scored list. **FIRST SINCE 1947:** With the win over ASU, Rick Stockstill picked up his seventh win of the season which is the most by a first-year coach at MT since Charles Murphy went 9-1 in 1947. **CAREER-BEST FOR GROSS:** With 79 rushing yards in the win over Arkansas State, Eugene Gross ran his season total to a career-best 784 yards to best his previous mark of 735 yards set as a freshman in 2003. Over his past four games, Gross has rushed for 481 yards on 79 attempts and six touchdowns. **QUICK HITTERS:** MT is 6-0 in conference play for the first time since 1992 ... The Blue Raiders are now 6-0 this season when leading at the half and are 34-5 overall during the I-A era ... QB Clint Marks made his 30th straight start under center today against ASU ... TE Clinton Corder recorded his first career kickoff return to open the game and returned it 21 yards ... Colby Smith connected on the 28th field

goal of his career when he nailed a 29-yarder in the first quarter ... Bradley Robinson made his third reception of the season and the fourth of his career when he reeled in one late in the second quarter ... RB Desmond Gee has now scored a touchdown in four straight games ... The team that has scored first in the MT-ASU series since both became SBC members has now won five of the six meetings ... Middle Tennessee has now outscored its Sun Belt opponents in the second half this season, 94-24.

Printed on March 13, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/22378