Blue Raiders Drop OT Thriller to Missouri

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COLUMBIA, Mo. - Middle Tennessee turned in its best performance of the year against #23 Missouri, but it would prove to be just a little less than needed as the Tigers upended the Blue Raiders 41-40 in overtime.

The Blue Raiders had the ball first in OT and proceeded to punch it into the endzone in four plays, but a rare miscue by Brian Kelly on the point-after try cost the Blue Raiders the extra point. The Tigers scored on their first possession in the extra period, but saw a dramatic extra point go through the uprights following a 15-yard penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct forced a 36-yard attempt.

The Blue Raiders churned up 483 yards of total offense with several players turning in outstanding efforts. Quarterback Andrico Hines threw for 248 yards on 19-of-31 passing to lead the offensive charge. RB Eugene Gross led the ground attack with 77 yards. The Blue Raiders also earned a season-high 197 yards rushing.

The Blue Raiders got things started early by marching 82 yards in 16 plays on their opening drive to take an early 7-0 lead. Hines completed 4 of 5 passes and capped off the drive with a four-yard TD strike to Wardell Alsup.

Missouri then stormed back behind Heisman candidate Brad Smith with 16 unanswered points to go ahead 16-7 in the second quarter. On the Blue Raiders' next possession, Eugene Gross connected on a 38-yard pass to Kerry Wright to setup a one-yard touchdown run by Gross. That made the score 16-14, but the Tigers responded by going 72 yards in just five plays to go back up by nine at 23-14.

The Blue Raiders set themselves up for the win with 17 unanswered points beginning in the second quarter. The Blue Raiders scored on their first two possessions of the third quarter to take a 31-23 lead. Mizzou kicked a field goal with 10:53 left in the game to cut the lead to 31-26.

Kelly would add a 21-yard field goal for the Blue Raiders to push the lead back to eight points with 5:16 left in the game.

Missouri took their final possession down the field for a 73-yard scoring drive, capped by a two-point conversion by QB Brad Smith to knot the score at 34. The Blue Raiders got a final possession in regulation but opted to run the clock out and take the overtime period.

NOTES

FIRST FOR ALSUP: WR Wardell Alsup recorded his first collegiate touchdown reception when he hauled in a four-yard strike from Andrico Hines on the Blue Raiders first possession of the game. The TD catch was also just the second of the year by a wide receiver.

ANOTHER BLOCK FOR INGRAM: For the second consecutive week, Pierre Ingram blocked an extra point when he rejected Missouri's early in the second quarter following their second touchdown. It marks the second block of Ingram's career and the 11th under head coach Andy McCollum. Of the 11 blocks under McCollum, five have been on extra points.

GROSS THE THROWER: RB Eugene Gross, a former quarterback in high school, completed his first collegiate pass today when he tossed a halfback pass to Kerry Wright for 38 yards. The pass play led to a one-yard touchdown run by Gross in the second quarter, which was his team-best third on the season.

WILLIAMS SETS PERSONAL BEST: WR Sam Williams, a redshirt freshman, set his personal mark in receptions by hauling in five passes against Missouri. Williams' previous high was two receptions against FAU and Clemson. Williams ended the day with 26 yards receiving.

WRIGHT HAS CAREER DAY: Kerry Wright, who had his first career 100-yard receiving game at Georgia earlier this year, grabbed seven catches for a career-high 144 yards. Wright's catch total was only one shy of his career best.

HINES HAS ANOTHER STRONG OUTING: Senior quarterback Andrico Hines, who is having a very solid season running the offense, had another stellar outing today at No. 23 Missouri. Hines completed 19-of-31 pass attempts for 248 yards and two touchdowns. He also tallied 21 yards on the ground, including a four-yard TD plunge in overtime. Hines has now tossed 118 straight passes without an interception.

BILLINGS RETURNING TO FORM: Punter Robert Billings looked to be returning to his all-conference form against Missouri. Billings, who missed the team's first game with an injury, booted four punts in the game for a 46 yard average, including a long kick of 54 yards.

ROAD WEARY: After today, the Blue Raiders will get a much needed respite from the road. The team will go nearly a month without leaving Murfreesboro, with a week off and then back-to-back home games against Temple and New Mexico State. The Blue Raiders next road game comes on Oct. 18 at Idaho.

TIDBITS: Today's game marked the first time a Blue Raider team has ever played on FieldTurf, but a number of Blue Raiders got a preview of the latest football surface technology when they traveled to Vanderbilt during the summer to play some 7-on-7 ... Middle Tennessee scored on its opening

drive of the game for the first time this season and the first time overall on the road since accomplishing the feat against Connecticut in 2001 ... OL Brandon Parker made his fourth career start today and his first since last year's UL-Lafayette game ... RB Eugene Gross recorded his team-best third rushing touchdown today against Missouri in the second quarter ... WR Jerrin Holt's 29-yard reception toward the end of the first half was the longest catch of his career ... RB Kevin Davis scored his second career touchdown when he rambled in from six yards out in the third quarter ... Interestingly enough, both teams in today's game were 8-of-15 on third down conversions in the contest ... The Blue Raiders are now 1-1 in overtime games since joining the I-A ranks ... The 40 points scored today was the most by the Blue Raiders against a ranked opponent in the school's history.

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