Stockstill named Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year

11 Blue Raiders make all-conference, 6 on first team

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's Rick Stockstill was named Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year and 11 total players earned all-conference honors as announced by the league today.

Stockstill, in his first year at the helm, guided the Blue Raiders to a conference championship, a 7-5 overall record, and a 6-1 conference mark to put Middle Tennessee in its first bowl game in the I-A era. The Blue Raiders will take on Mid-American champion Central Michigan in the Motor City Bowl Dec. 26.

Stockstill is the first conference coach of the year at Middle Tennessee since Boots Donnelly in 1989.

"This is a great compliment to our football program," said Stockstill. "It's an individual award I am proud and honored to receive but I understand it was not just me. This coaching staff and these players had as much to do with Middle Tennessee receiving this award as anyone."

The league's coaches and selected media members honored junior Erik Walden, junior Tavares

Jones, senior J.K. Sabb, junior Damon Nickson, senior Colby Smith, freshman Desmond Gee, senior Clint Marks, senior Eugene Gross, sophomore Franklin Dunbar, senior Germayle Franklin, and senior Justin Rainey as all-league picks in 2006.

The Blue Raiders led the Sun Belt in first-team selections with Walden, Jones, Sabb, Nickson, Smith, and Gee earning top billing. Nickson was a first-team pick as a defensive back and as a return specialist to give the Blue Raiders seven total positions and tie them with the 2001 team for most first-team selections.

Garnering second-team honors for the Blue Raiders were Marks, Gross, Franklin, Dunbar, and Rainey.

Walden, who currently ranks 16th nationally in sacks, turned in his best year as a Blue Raider by setting the school record with 9.5 sacks and becoming the school's all-time leader in sacks with 18.5. For the year, Walden had a personal-best 42 tackles, forced three fumbles and had 12.5 tackles for loss.

Jones, who made the move from linebacker to defensive end in the spring, had a career year with 35 stops and personal-bests in tackles for loss (9.5) and sacks (5.5).

Sabb, a second team all-conference pick in 2005, enjoyed an even better season in his final year by collecting a team-high 67 tackles and career-bests in tackles for loss (14.5) and sacks (4). The Augusta, Ga., native ranks sixth all-time at Middle Tennessee with 27.5 tackles for loss and was recently named the SBC Defensive Player of the Year by ESPN.com's Pat Forde.

The breakout player for the Blue Raiders in 2006 was Nickson. The Milton, Fla., product became the first Blue Raider to earn first team conference honors at two different positions since Dee Mostiller in 1996. Defensively, Nickson was third on the team with 56 tackles and a league-best five interceptions, while also leading the SBC in kickoff returns with 19 for 569 yards, two touchdowns, and a 29.94 per return average.

Smith, who also enjoyed a solid year as a placekicker by making 8 of 12 attempts, earned his second straight all-conference honor as a punter. The Franklin, Tenn., native led the SBC in punting with a 41.1-yard average and placed a career-best 20 inside the opponent's 20-yard line. All Blue Raider fans will remember the season opener against FIU when Smith's 79-yarder turned field position in Middle Tennessee's favor and played a key role in the victory.

Despite not being voted the Sun Belt's freshman of the year, Gee was the only freshman to be placed on the league's first team. The cat-quick Gee was third on the team in rushing and added 18 receptions for 288 yards. The Greenville, Fla., product scored eight total touchdowns and ended the regular season by reaching the endzone in six straight games.

Gross and Franklin earned second-team honors for the second straight year, while Marks, Dunbar and Rainey were voted All-SBC for the first time in their careers.

"I am really happy for all these players because they are very deserving of the recognition," said Stockstill. "They each had outstanding seasons at their position. When a team has success then individuals are honored and each player will tell you they could not have had the year they did without their teammates."

The Blue Raiders will return to the practice field on Friday in preparation for the Motor City Bowl on Dec. 26. The team will also hold its season-ending banquet on Saturday night.

2006 ALL-SUN BELT CONFERENCE HONORS

First Team Offense

QB: Omar Haugabook (Troy, Jr.)
RB: Tyrell Fenroy (ULL, So.)
RB: Calvin Dawson (ULM, Jr.)
WR: Johnny Quinn (UNT, Sr.)
WR: Gary Banks (Troy, Jr.)
TE: Samuel Smith (FIU, Sr.)
OL: Tanner Jenkins (ASU, Sr.)
OL: Nello Faulk (FAU, Sr.)
OL: Brandon Cox (ULL, Sr.)
OL: Dylan Lineberry (UNT, Sr.)
OL: Zach Yenser (Troy, Sr.)

First Team Defense
DL: Antwan Barnes (FIU, Sr.)
DL: Erik Walden (MT, Jr.)
DL: Josh Pinnick (FAU, Jr.)
DL: Tavares Jones (MT, Jr.)
LB: Alexander Bostic III (FIU, Sr.)
LB: Keyonvis Bouie (FIU, Sr.)
LB: J.K. Sabb (MT, Sr.)
DB: Tyrell Johnson (ASU, Jr.)
DB: Kevin Payne (ULM, Sr.)
DB: Damon Nickson (MT, Jr.)
DB: Brannon Condren (Troy, Sr.)

First Team Specialists

K: Drew Edmiston (ULL, So.)
P: Colby Smith (MT, Sr.)
RS: Damon Nickson (MT, Jr.)
All Purpose: Desmond Gee (MT, Fr.)

Second Team Offense

QB: Clint Marks (MT, Sr.)
RB: Reggie Arnold (ASU, Fr.)
RB: Eugene Gross (MT, Sr.)
WR: Chandler Williams (FIU, Sr.)
WR: LaGregory Sapp (ULM, So.)
TE: Zeek Zacharie (ULM, So.)
OL: Matt Mandich (ASU, So.)
OL: Franklin Dunbar MT, So.)
OL: Germayle Franklin (MT, Sr.)
OL: Kyle Cunningham (ULM, Jr.)

OL: Kirbie Bodiford (Troy, Sr.)

Second Team Defense
DL: Jamarrow James (ASU, Sr.)
DL: Jervonte Jackson (FAU, So.)
DL: Jeremiah Chapman (UNT, Jr.)
DL: Franklin Lloyd (Troy, Sr.)
LB: Koby McKinnon (ASU, Jr.)
LB: Devrett Wade (ASU, Sr.)
LB: Justin Rainey (MT, Sr.)
DB: Khayyam Burns (ASU, Jr.)
DB: Taheem Acevedo (FAU, Jr.)
DB: Kris Bartels (FAU, Jr.)
DB: Lionell Singleton (FIU, Jr.)

Second Team Specialists
K: Cole Wilson (ULM, Jr.)
P: Truman Spencer (UNT, So.)
RS: Leodis McKelvin (Troy, Jr.)
All Purpose: Michael Desormeaux (ULL, So.)

Honorable Mention: Oren O'Neal (ASU, Sr., RB), Jonathan Najm (ASU, Sr., DL), Charles Pierre (FAU, So., RB), Cergile Sincere (FAU, Jr., LB), Josh Padrick (FIU, Sr., QB), Ashlyn Parker (FIU, Fr., WR), Rodney Hardeway (ULL, Jr., DL), Jesse Newman (ULL, Jr., OL), Adam Hill (ULM, Jr., OL), Josh Thompson (ULM, So., DB), Maurice Holman (UNT, Jr., LB), Aaron Weathers (UNT, Jr., DB), Kenny Cattouse (Troy, Jr., RB), Boris Lee (Troy, Fr., LB)

Player of the Year: Omar Haugabook (Troy, Jr., QB)
Offensive Player of the Year: Omar Haugabook (Troy, Jr., QB)
Defensive Player of the Year: Keyonvis Bouie (FIU, Sr., LB)
Newcomer of the Year: Omar Haugabook (Troy, Jr., QB)
Freshman of the Year: Reggie Arnold (ASU, Fr.)
Coach of the Year: Rick Stockstill, MT

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