Blue Raiders go behind the scenes with ESPN

Conference call gives broadcast team opportunity to learn more about team

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DETROIT - Four Middle Tennessee football players spent part of Christmas afternoon conducting a conference call with ESPN's Dave Lamont and Ray Bentley as part of the preparation for Tuesday's Motor City Bowl broadcast. · **Photos:** Christmas Day Activites · **Video:** Daily Highlights · **More multimedia...** Lamont and Bentley, who will make up part of the broadcast team, conducted a conference call with quarterback Clint Marks, running back Eugene Gross, defensive back Damon Nickson, and defensive end Erik Walden as they quizzed the quartet on the Blue Raiders' 2006 success, first-year coach Rick Stockstill, and Tuesday's Motor City Bowl date against Central Michigan. Kickoff for the nationally-televised game is 6:30 p.m., on ESPN. Members of broadcast teams generally meet with or set up conference calls with players prior to these games as part of their preparation as a means of finding out more information and deciphering what to look for as the game unfolds. The broadcast team specifically quizzed players on what has been the greatest difference during a 7-5 season that included a share of the Sun Belt Conference championship and the program's first appearance in a bowl game as a Division I-A member. Prior to 2006, Middle Tennessee had endured four straight losing seasons. The broadcast team specifically wanted to know how big of an impact Stockstill made in his first season as evidenced by the success of these Blue Raiders. "He's changed everything," Marks told them. When asked to give a specific example Marks told them, "I really do mean he has changed everything, attitude, approach, school, and you see the results." In regard to the same question Nickson told the broadcast tandem Stockstill is responsible for making players on the team understand what it means to be a winner, and "not just on the field." "Coach Stock expects us to be winners in all walks of our lives and he stresses that, whether it is going to class, helping others, knowing how to act, all of that," Nickson said. Each player also was asked to talk about the person in their life who has made the greatest impact or been their mentor. The answer produced two fathers and two mothers. Marks named his father, Carlos Marks, and Gross said his father, Eugene Gross Sr., had the greatest impact in his life. Nickson praised his mother, Hazel, and Walden also demonstrated a great deal of respect and gratitude when saying his mother, Shirley, had the greatest impact in his life and always taught him the importance of treating others the "way I would want to be treated, and to always act right." The offensive players, Marks and Gross, were

asked to name players they may have tried to emulate or look up to as their positions. Marks said Packers quarterback Brett Favre was someone he enjoyed watching growing up, while Gross rattled off a list of notable ball carriers. All four players did get into chalk talk with the announcers as to how they intend to defend and attack Central Michigan; however, we will let the broadcasters make that known during their national broadcast Tuesday as the Blue Raiders step onto the field and make history.

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