Blue Raider upset falls short at No. 8 Louisville

MT's 42 points not enough in shootout

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. - Middle Tennessee found its offense in Louisville, Ky., but unfortunately, for the Blue Raiders, No. 8 Louisville's high-octane offense continued to click in a 58-42 shootout at Papa John's Cardinal Stadium Thursday night. After generating just 44 yards total offense in the first half and 217 for the game in the season opener at Florida Atlantic, Middle Tennessee erupted for 212 yards total offense in the first quarter alone here Thursday night. A Cardinal Stadium sellout crowd of 40,882 and a national television audience were treated to an offensive showcase as the teams combined for a whopping 1,284 yards total offense (Middle Tennessee - 555, Louisville 729), and 13 touchdowns. The Blue Raiders scored touchdowns on their first five offensive possessions, and Louisville scored touchdowns on their first four possessions before settling for a field goal on its fifth and then cashing in for another touchdown on its sixth possession. The Blue Raiders finally forced a Cardinal punt on their seventh possession just before halftime but Middle Tennessee was unable to capitalize going into the intermission when quarterback Joe Craddock was intercepted with less than 30 seconds remaining. In all, the teams combined to score on 11-of-13 first-half possessions on the way to a 38-35 halftime score. It was a first half that featured 760 yards total offense and a staggering 73 points. Making his second career start, Craddock was 14-of-26 for 290 yards with a 78-yard touchdown pass to DeMarco McNair and a 24-yard scoring strike to Bobby Williams. McNair's 78-

yard touchdown reception matched the sixth-longest receiving touchdown in school history and was the longest ever by a running back. The outstanding passing fancy was complimented by sterling running behind an inexperienced and beat up offensive line, which included freshmen Jamal Lewis and Mark Fisher, along with sophomore center Mark Thompson. The Blue Raiders rushed for 127 yards on just 13 attempts in the first half, led by McNair's 69 yards. The senior tailback had a 39-yard touchdown run, while sophomore standout Phillip Tanner rambled for two first-half touchdown runs. They finished with 265 yards on the ground with Tanner leading the charge with 144 yards and three touchdowns. McNair added 72 yards on seven carries. The receiving corps was led by McNair (3 receptions, 92 yards, 1TD) and Patrick Honeycutt (2 receptions, 87 yards.) The scoring bonanza began with Louisville quarterback Brian Brohm, a Heisman Trophy candidate, connecting with tight end Gary Barnidge for an 81-yard touchdown pass on the game's first play. The Blue Raiders answered with McNair's dynamic 78-yard score. Brohm came right back with a 71-yard touchdown pass to Mario Urrutia to put his team on top 14-7 and one of Middle Tennessee's only mistakes of the first-half followed when Damon Nickson fumbled the ensuing kickoff. The Cardinals turned the turnover into points on a 5-yard run from Anthony Allen to extend the lead to 21-7 less than five minutes into the game. Middle Tennessee continued to battle with scores from Tanner and Williams before the end of the first quarter. After holding Louisville to a 31-yard field goal from Art Carmody early in the second quarter, Middle Tennessee finally narrowed the gap when McNair broke loose for a 39-yard scoring scamper to pull the Blue Raiders to within 31-28 with 11:10 remaining in the half. Each team scored a touchdown before the half to leave the score 38-35. The third quarter turned into a defensive battle with Middle Tennessee's Jeremy Kellem recovering a fumble on Louisville's first drive, and Rod Issac making a big-time hit on the next Cardinal possession to hold them to a 30-yard field goal, leaving the score 41-35. The difference; however, was Louisville's defense in the third quarter. The Cardinals were able to keep the Blue Raiders off the scoreboard in the decisive frame and even though the Blue Raider defense buckled down and held Louisville to 13 third-quarter points, Middle Tennessee's 16-point deficit entering the fourth stanza proved too much to overcome. Still, there was plenty of fight left in Rick Stockstill's Blue Raiders, who cut the Cardinals' lead to 51-42 when Tanner took the handoff and outran the Louisville defense for a 79-yard scoring run on the first play of the fourth quarter. Matt King's point after pulled the Blue Raiders to within 51-42 with 14:46 remaining and left the game in doubt heading into the final stretch. Tanner's 79-yard rushing touchdown tied Dwone Hicks for the longest touchdown run in the Division I-A era. Hicks had a 79-yard score against Louisiana Tech in 2000. Louisville proved why it is regarded as one of the nation's top teams when Brohm connected Harry Douglas for a 10-yard touchdown to complete an eight-play, 79-yard scoring drive and provide a 58-42 lead with 11:20 remaining. Middle Tennessee drove to the Louisville 6 on its next possession but its final chance to pull of the upset was stymied when Craddock was intercepted in the end zone with 7:08 remaining. The Blue Raiders will face another daunting task at No. 2 LSU, Sept. 15. **Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:**
YOUTH IS SERVED: In last week's season opener, Middle Tennessee had 14 players compete in their first collegiate football game with 12 being true or redshirt freshmen. The Blue Raiders also had a total of three players make their first collegiate start. In tonight's game against Louisville, MT added to that total as four players made their debut including Wes Caldwell, Antwan Davis, Byron McLeod, and Emmanuel Perez. **RECORD RECEPTION:** DeMarco McNair's 78-yard touchdown reception from Joe Craddock on Middle Tennessee's first possession went down as the longest ever by a running back for the Blue Raiders. It also matched the sixth longest catch in school history with Robert Alford's 78-yard reception against Austin Peay on Oct. 26, 1985. **TANNER SHINES:** Sophomore Phillip Tanner, who played on defense last year as a true freshman, had a night to remember at No. 8 Louisville. The Dallas, Texas native rushed for a career-best 144 yards and three

touchdowns. Tanner did his damage on just nine carries and turned in a 79-yard run that matched the longest in the I-A era. Tanner's 144 yards went down as the third 100-yard rushing game under Rick Stockstill and was the second most behind Eugene Gross' 208 yards against FAU last year. **BIG TURNAROUND:** What a difference a week makes for the Blue Raider offense. In the season opener last week Middle Tennessee had just 44 total yards in the first half and finished with just 217 yards for the game. In the first quarter alone against No. 8 Louisville the Blue Raiders tacked on 212 yards of total offense and finished the game with 555 yards for an average of 10.1 yards per play. **CRADDOCK HAS BIG NIGHT:** Junior quarterback Joe Craddock turned in his best game as a collegian against No. 8 Louisville by completing 14-of-26 passes for a career-best 290 yards, including 224 yards through the air in the first half. Craddock's effort went down as the fifth 200-yard passing game under Rick Stockstill. After two games, Craddock has thrown for 489 yards. **OFFENSIVE SHOW:** After a tough debut last week at Florida Atlantic, the Blue Raider offense turned in quite a performance against No. 8 Louisville. The Blue Raiders amassed 555 total yards of offense which was the most ever in the Rick Stockstill era while tacking on 42 points. The 42 points went down as the most ever by Middle Tennessee against a Top 10 team and the most ever against a nationally-ranked opponent. The previous high against a ranked team was 40 points against No. 23 Missouri in 2003. **IMPROVED GROUND ATTACK:** After rushing for just 18 yards in the season opener at FAU, Middle Tennessee met the challenge and turned in 365 yards on the ground at No. 8 Louisville. An inexperienced line consisting of two freshman and a sophomore paved the way for running backs DeMarco McNair, Phillip Tanner, and quarterback Joe Craddock. Sophomore center Mark Thompson was playing his first game ever at center and freshmen Mark Fisher and Jamal Lewis were making their first career starts. The Blue Raiders, who had runs of 79, 39, 23, and 23 yards, were led by Phillip Tanner's career-best 144 yards and DeMarco McNair's 72 yards. **QUICK HITTERS:** OT Franklin Dunbar made his team-best 20th straight start tonight ... Phillip Tanner's 79-yard touchdown run matched the longest run in the I-A era ... WR Bobby Williams made his second career touchdown reception and the first of the season when he hauled in a 24-yard strike from Joe Craddock ... WR Patrick Honeycutt reeled in a career-best 52-yard pass in the second quarter ... The 78-yard catch by McNair went down as the third longest play in the Rick Stockstill era ... MT dropped to 4-3 on Thursday nights ... The Blue Raiders fell to 0-12 against nationally-ranked teams since joining the FBS in 1999 ... MT has three players on its roster from the state of Kentucky (Salin Simpson, Wes Caldwell, and Chris Hawkins) ... Freshman Jeremy Kellem started the second half at safety ... The 35 points scored in the first half by MT marked the most in the first half under Rick Stockstill and the 21 first quarter points matched the most ever in a quarter under Stockstill.

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