Blue Raiders suffer home-opening loss, 20-17

Dasher makes first career start at QB

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's home opener was spoiled by rival Western Kentucky when reserve quarterback K.J. Black threw a 22-yard touchdown early in the fourth quarter to lead the Hilltoppers to a 20-17 win in front of 22,086 at Floyd Stadium.

The crowd was the fifth-largest in Floyd Stadium history but most of them left disappointed after the Blue Raiders (0-4) suffered their fourth loss in 20 days. Middle Tennessee was playing without starting quarterback Joe Craddock, who was suffering from a back injury. His status is day-to-day.

Freshman quarterback Dwight Dasher completed 14-of-24 passes for 169 yards and rushed for a team-high 53 yards on 16 carries but his starting debut was dashed by the visiting Hilltoppers (3-1), who are in the first transition season to the Football Bowl Subdivision, formerly Division I-A.

Black entered the game in the third quarter and promptly led Western Kentucky on a 9-play, 55-yard scoring drive. Chris James hit a 34-yard field goal with 6:14 left in the third quarter to give WKU a 13-10 lead.

The Blue Raiders answered with a 71-yard scoring drive to take a 17-13 lead with 3:13 left in the third quarter. DeMarco McNair scored the second of his two touchdowns on a 4-yard run.

Middle Tennessee had a chance to tie the game at the end of regulation.

The Blue Raiders received possession with 39 seconds remaining in the game after forcing a Western Kentucky punt.

Dasher led Middle Tennessee on a 49-yard drive to the Western Kentucky 17. With four seconds remaining, Matt King missed a 34-yard field goal on the final play of the game.

The Hilltoppers rolled up 234 yards on the ground. Tyrell Hayden rushed for a career-high 144 yards and scored a touchdown for Western Kentucky. Black added 56 yards rushing.

Dasher completed 14-of-24 passes for 169 yards and led the Raiders in rushing with 53 yards.

Middle Tennessee took a 3-0 lead after one quarter on the strength of King's 19-yard field goal.

Western Kentucky answered with 10 points in the second quarter on James' 41-yard field goal and Hayden's 9-yard touchdown.

The Blue Raiders were able to tie the game at 10 with 1:02 remaining in the half after McNair scored on a 1-yard run.

GAME NOTES

DASHER GETS START: True freshman Dwight Dasher made his first collegiate start tonight against rival Western Kentucky. Dasher learned earlier in the week that he would be under center when the game began following news of starter Joe Craddock having a back injury.

WALDEN MOVES UP: Senior Erik Walden, the school's all-time sack leader, recorded his second and third TFL's of the season to move up the all-time list. Walden surpassed Anthony McCord for third place and now has 34.5 TFL's for his career. Walden needs just two more to take over second place from Anthony Hicks.

PLAYMAKER: True freshman Jeremy Kellem has proved early in his career that he always seems to be around the football. In just four games and the last two as a starter, Kellem already has a fumble recovery, a blocked punt, a pass breakup, a forced fumble, and an interception. Kellem added his first pick at the end of the first half off a tipped ball and a forced fumble in the third quarter against the Hilltoppers.

MCNAIR FOR SIX: Senior DeMarco McNair turned in the third game of his career with two or more rushing touchdowns with two TD runs against WKU tonight. It marked the first time he has scored at least two touchdowns on the ground at home. For the year, McNair has three rushing touchdowns and 12 for his career.

DASHER SOLID: Freshman Dwight Dasher, making his first collegiate start, had a solid showing in front of the home crowd. Dasher completed 14 of 24 passes for a career-best 169 yards while adding a team-high 53 yards on the ground. Even more impressive was Dasher not committing any turnovers in his starting debut.

FIFTH LARGEST: Tonight's attendance of 22,086 went down as the fifth largest in the history of Floyd Stadium and is the third crowd of over 20,000 under Rick Stockstill.

CAREER NIGHT FOR HENRY: Senior Taron Henry hauled in a career-best six receptions for 81 yards against WKU. Henry's previous high was five receptions set on two occasions.

QUICK HITTERS: OT Franklin Dunbar made his team-best 22nd straight start tonight ... FB Jacob Longoria made his first collegiate start tonight against WKU ... PK Matt King connected on his first career field goal when he nailed a 19-yard field goal in the first quarter ... Middle Tennessee's defense started a combination of six defensive backs and safeties tonight ... MT's 3-0 first quarter lead was its first of the season ... SS Roy Polite recorded a career-best nine tackles.

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