

Blue Raiders renew Memphis series in 'Dash'ing fashion

Dasher accounts for 410 of 490 yards in 21-7 win against Tigers

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MEMPHIS - Middle

Tennessee came away with a monumental win against in-state rival Memphis as freshman quarterback Dwight Dasher did something no signal-caller in school history had, and the Blue Raider defense put together perhaps its best effort of the Rick Stockstill era.

The end result was gratifying 21-7 win against the Tigers as the Blue Raiders secured their first win against a Conference USA opponent and did so at the expense of in-state rival Memphis in the renewal of a series that had laid dormant since 1954.

Dasher had 410 yards total offense, throwing for one touchdown and running for another in his finest hour as a Blue Raider quarterback. His 180 yards rushing are the most ever by a Middle Tennessee signal caller, eclipsing the previous record of 172 by Marvin Collier in

1987. Ironically, Collier also set his standard at the Liberty Bowl. His 180 yards came on 16 carries and included a 61-yard scamper that sealed the game late.

Dasher also completed 16 of 26 passes for 230 yards and a 55-yard scoring pass to DeMarco



McNair. His steady play led all offensive players in the contest; however, it was stellar defensive play that keyed the win. The go-ahead touchdown was set up after the defense forced a turnover. Linebacker Danny Carmichael, who was all over the field, forced a fumble and Tavares Jones pounced on it for the recovery to set up McNair's go-ahead score in the third quarter.

Carmichael and Jones led the Blue Raiders with seven tackles each as the Blue Raiders (2-5) limited the Tigers (2-4) to 65 yards in the second half, including 20 in the decisive fourth quarter and just 248 yards in the game, while the Middle Tennessee offense generated 490 yards total offense.

Dasher's offensive mastery was complimented by the play of McNair, who rushed for one touchdown and had the long touchdown reception.

Middle Tennessee drew first blood when Dasher connected with McNair for a 55-yard touchdown pass on a 2-and-9 call. It was McNair's sixth touchdown in the last four games and his third this season of 50 yards or longer. Matt King's point after provided the Blue Raiders a 7-0 lead with 11:34 remaining in the first quarter. It set a good tone for the Middle Tennessee offense as it marched 80 yards in seven plays in 3:26.

The Blue Raider defense displayed a bend-don't-break approach on Memphis' first offensive drive. The Tigers drove to the Middle Tennessee 28 but on first-and-10 Trevor Jenkins dropped T.J. Pitts for a 2-yard loss and Memphis eventually was forced to attempt a 42-yard field goal that Matt Reagan left wide to the left.

Memphis fought back to even the score, 7-7, when Will Hudgens connected with Duke Calhoun for a 19-yard scoring pass with 58 seconds remaining in the opening quarter. The scoring pass came on a third-and-3 play but the Blue Raiders were unable to get off the field.

It started as an offensive outburst with the two early touchdowns but it materialized into a defensive battle the remainder of the half. After rolling up 80 yards on its opening drive Middle Tennessee had just 114 the rest of the half and the pattern was similar for Memphis. The Tigers racked up 80 yards on their scoring drive on the second possession of the of the game but they were held to 103 the rest of the half.

Dasher had an efficient opening half, completing 9-of-13 passes for 147 yards but the Blue Raiders couldn't sustain drives.

Middle Tennessee appeared to have something going on its first drive of the third quarter after forcing Memphis to punt. Dasher marched the Blue Raiders to the Memphis 13, completing two big passes on third-down and running for 25 yards on the key play during the drive; however, the freshman committed the first turnover of his young career when he was intercepted in the end zone. It was Dasher's first interception in 96 pass attempts.

The Blue Raider defense returned the favor when Carmichael leveled tailback T.J. Pitts and forced a fumble that was recovered by Tavares Jones at the Memphis 14. McNair plunged in from the 1 four plays later and King added the point after to provide Middle Tennessee a 14-7 lead with 8:53 remaining in the third quarter.

Wes Hofacker's back-to-back sacks on Memphis' next offensive possession forced another Tiger punt. The Blue Raiders marched from their 14 to the Memphis 27 before the drive stalled and David

DeFatta was called up to attempt a 45-yard field goal. His effort was wide left and the score remained 14-7 with 2:19 remaining in the third quarter.

The Blue Raiders dominated play in the third quarter, holding the Tigers to just 44 yards and no points. They made a big stop on fourth-and-4 from the Blue Raider 31 when Will Hudgens' pass fell incomplete.

Middle Tennessee was driving in an attempt to put the game away when Dasher fumbled and the Tigers pounced on the loose ball at their 41 with 12:43 remaining and renewed hope in the tight game.

As it had done so many times throughout the night, Middle Tennessee's defense rose to the occasion and forced another Tiger punt. And, holding to form, the Blue Raiders put together an impressive drive and converted three third downs on their way to the Memphis 23. The field goal unit came on but instead of taking a swing at a 40-yard field goal the Blue Raiders tried a fake and Patrick Jackson was stopped 1-yard shy of the first down.

The Blue Raider defense forced another Tiger punt and returned possession to the offense at the Middle Tennessee 39 with under four minutes remaining.

After leaving the door open for Memphis so many times the Blue Raiders finally slammed it when Dasher broke loose for the 61-yard touchdown with 3:46 remaining to seal the win.

Middle Tennessee returns to action when it plays host to Arkansas State Saturday at 2:30 p.m.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes

BLUE RAIDERS VS STATE SCHOOLS: Middle Tennessee ran its record to 7-1 against in-state school's since joining the FBS in 1999. Four of the seven wins have come on the road against Vanderbilt (three times) and Memphis. The Blue Raiders' lone loss during this span was to No. 4 Tennessee in 2002. Rick Stockstill is now 2-0 against teams from the state of Tennessee.

FIRST VS C-USA: Middle Tennessee's win over Memphis marked its first in two tries against Conference USA. The Blue Raiders fell to UAB in 2000 in their only other meeting with a C-USA team.

MCNAIR COMES UP BIG ... AGAIN: Senior DeMarco McNair is starting to make a habit of registering big plays. The running back's latest was a 55-yard reception in the first quarter to give the Blue Raiders an early 7-0 lead. It marked McNair's third receiving touchdown of the season and his Sun Belt Conference leading eighth TD overall and he later added his ninth with a 1-yard run. All three touchdown receptions have been 55 or more yards as he also registered a 78 yarder at Louisville and a 71 yarder against FIU. The 55-yard play tied for the 10th longest in the Stockstill era.

SCORING MACHINE: DeMarco McNair turned in his fourth multiple touchdown game of the season with two scores against the Tigers. McNair, who has had at least one TD in four straight games, has had two touchdown games against Louisville, WKU, FIU, and now Memphis. The seniors 54 points this year is a new career-high for the Thomson, Ga., native.

ROAD DEBUT: True freshman Dwight Dasher made his road debut as the Blue Raiders' starting quarterback and he did not disappoint with another solid outing. Dasher, who accounted for 125 of

the team's 127 yards of total offense in the first quarter, completed 16-of-26 passes for 230 yards and one touchdown. Dasher topped the 200-yard passing mark for the second time in three games.

DASHER TOPS 100: QB Dwight Dasher made history in his first road start with 180 yards rushing on just 19 carries, including a 61-yard touchdown that iced the game. The 186 yards rushing are the most by a quarterback in school history. Dasher eclipsed the record of 172 by Marvin Collier against Mississippi Valley State, Oct. 10, 1987. Ironically, Collier's mark was also established in the Liberty Bowl. Dasher is the first Blue Raider signal-caller to top the century mark since Wes Counts had 122 yards against Connecticut on Nov. 17, 2001. It also marks the fourth 100-yard rushing game under Rick Stockstill.

SEASON HIGH FOR GEE: WR Desmond Gee, who did not play last week due to an ankle injury, turned in his best game of the year in the receiving department. The sophomore hauled in a season-best four receptions for 41 yards and his previous high was two grabs against FAU, Louisville, WKU and FIU. For the year, Gee has 12 catches.

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee scored on its opening drive of the game for the third time this season and the seventh time under Rick Stockstill ... OT Franklin Dunbar made his team-best 25th straight start tonight while DT Trevor Jenkins made his 20th straight start ... DE Erik Walden played tonight for the first time since the WKU game when he suffered a toe injury ... MT gained 127 total yards in the first quarter and QB Dwight Dasher accounted for 125 of those yards ... QB Dwight Dasher threw his first career interception tonight in the third quarter and it came in his fourth game as a starter ... DE Tavares Jones had his third career fumble recovery when he accounted for one in the third quarter to help setup a Blue Raider TD ... CB Alex Suber recorded his first career sack tonight in the third quarter ... David DeFatta attempted his first field goal as a Blue Raider in the third quarter against Memphis and he missed from 38 yards.

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