

March 16, 2008

## Stockstill Q&A entering spring practice

### Team hits the field Monday

MT Media Relations

#### WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE OFFSEASON CONDITIONING PROGRAM AND WHO WERE SOME OF THE STANDOUTS?

I thought our offseason program went well. With this being such a young team with 11 seniors and 13 juniors, I think it is critical to find out who our leaders are going to be this season. I thought we got outstanding leadership from Lonnie Clemons, [Trevor Jenkins](#), [Wes Hofacker](#), [Anthony Glover](#), [Andrew Harrington](#), and underclassmen [Danny Carmichael](#), [Mark Thompson](#), [Jamal Lewis](#), and [Mark Fisher](#). I believe we got stronger and the players that needed to lose or gain weight have done a decent job in that area. We still have a handful of players who are too heavy that must lose weight before August or they will have a hard time competing on the field. Strength, conditioning, diet, and taking care of your body is a year-round process. To play at your highest level requires you to eat healthy and condition your body and mind on a daily basis.

#### GIVE AN UPDATE ON THE FOLLOWING INJURED PLAYERS: DWIGHT DASHER, LANDON GIVERS, WESLEY HALE, IVON HICKMON, BYRON MCLEOD, JAKE PADRICK, BRANDON PERRY, AND GARY TUCKER.

**Dwight Dasher:** Went through the offseason without any problems. I believe he is 100 percent and will be able to do everything this spring.

**Landon Givers:** He is still limited and has not been cleared yet for contact. He has a wonderful attitude and has worked very hard.

**Wesley Hale:** We may have to watch or limit his contact early in the spring, but he is progressing well.

**Ivon Hickmon:** Has been limited this offseason with certain lifts and drills. Hopefully, he will be cleared for spring practice.

**Byron McLeod:** I doubt he will be able to have any contact this spring but he is progressing well in his rehabilitation. He has not been cleared to compete.

**Jake Padrick:** We expect him to be cleared for spring practice. He will have to wear a shoulder harness and we will probably limit him during the early part of practice.

**Brandon Perry:** He has not been able to run but we are hopeful he will be able to participate in spring drills. We really will not know until the start of practice.

**Gary Tucker:** He is not cleared 100 percent yet. We will probably have to limit what he does in practice and it is doubtful he will be allowed to participate in any contact drills.

#### WHAT WILL YOU GO INTO SPRING DRILLS WANTING TO FINE TUNE THE MOST ON OFFENSE FROM A YEAR AGO?

We are still evolving as an offensive unit. I want to continue to move our offense in the direction of an explosive play, fast paced, multiple offense that dictates and controls the tempo. We still do not have the numbers at wide receiver and running back to do everything we want on offense, but each year we hope to get a little closer. We only have two wide receivers that have lettered and only two running backs that have lettered, so obviously we are very thin and inexperienced at both positions. We will have to bring freshmen and redshirt freshmen along very fast. We have to find a wide receiver who will be the guy we will count on and depend on. [Desmond Gee](#) has been that guy, but now he will be seeing a lot more time in the backfield.

#### AFTER THE UNEXPECTED LOSS OF FRANKLIN DUNBAR TO PURSUE HIS CAREER IN THE NFL, YOU WERE LEFT WITH THREE RETURNING STARTERS ON THE OFFENSIVE LINE. GIVE FANS YOUR TAKE ON THE OFFENSIVE LINE; WHO MIGHT BE A SURPRISE THIS YEAR?

I think we are getting great leadership out of [Mark Thompson](#), [Mark Fisher](#), and [Jamal Lewis](#). Fisher was a true freshman last year and improved each game, so hopefully he will be a lot more confident and better this year. Lewis was a first-year player as well last year so I think he will be much better this season. We had to move Thompson around because of the injuries we had last year and he had a good season. I would really like to leave him at center but with the departure of Dunbar he will now go to left tackle. Hopefully, [Jake Padrick](#) will be healthy and will be able to be our center. I feel that Padrick, [Chris Hawkins](#), [Colin Boss](#) and [Mike](#)



Rick Stockstill and the Blue Raiders will begin spring drills on Monday. ()

[Williams](#) have to step up and contribute. We basically have three offensive linemen that have played college football, so the guys I mentioned have to be ready because it is very difficult to play along the line as a true freshman. Hopefully we can redshirt the signees and finally begin to build some depth.

**AS A TRUE FRESHMAN, DWIGHT DASHER WAS THROWN INTO THE FIRE LAST YEAR AND RESPONDED REMARKABLY WELL. WITH A YEAR'S EXPERIENCE UNDER HIS BELT, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO SEE FROM DASHER IN 2008?**

I hope, but I know he is only going to get better. He must continue to compete and work and improve in all facets of his game. He should be more confident and manage the game better this year. There is continued growth in becoming a great quarterback. It does not just happen after one season. He has to become a "student" of the game where he knows everything about the offense and just doesn't rely on his athletic ability. His leadership skills will continue to improve as he matures into the quarterback position. He relied on his athletic ability in high school and now he must master the fundamentals and responsibilities of being a college quarterback. This spring and summer will determine how much he improves for this year. He has a great attitude and I have no doubts that he will work as hard as he can to become a complete player.

**DESMOND GEE IS A TWO-TIME FIRST TEAM ALL-CONFERENCE PERFORMER AND THE TRUE DEFINITION OF AN ALL-PURPOSE PLAYER. WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE NAME DESMOND GEE?**

Unselfish! Desmond is a team player and has done everything and anything we have asked of him. He practices and plays full speed every snap. He has tremendous drive and character to be the best at everything he does. Everyone knows what a great player he is, but they don't see how he competes and works everyday in practice. He is one of our better leaders. He does not say much but his actions speak very loud! Desmond is a great example of a "winner".

**THE FIRST TWO YEARS YOU HAVE EMPLOYED A BACKFIELD BY COMMITTEE. DO YOU PREFER THIS METHOD OR WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE ONE BACK EMERGE AS THE BELL COW?**

I think you have to have multiple backs in college football today, especially the people we have to play. This year we will primarily have [Desmond Gee](#) and [Phillip Tanner](#). I feel good about both of them. Tanner was hurt the last half of last year but I expect him to play at a high level this season. I really feel Gee can be a great back as well in this conference and in our offense. Both of these guys can run with speed and Tanner has more power while Gee possesses more wiggle.

**THE BLUE RAIDERS SLIPPED FROM FIRST TO FIFTH IN THE CONFERENCE IN RUSHING DEFENSE LAST YEAR, SO WILL THAT BE A POINT OF EMPHASIS THIS SPRING AND FALL?**

I believe to be a good defense you have to stop the run, create turnovers, and be good on third down. We were not a good tackling team last year, and some of that can be attributed to our injuries and some to fundamentals. We can not do anything about injuries, but we can improve our fundamentals. We will really emphasize that part of our defense this spring.

**YOU LOSE TWO OF THE TOP THREE SACK LEADERS OF ALL-TIME IN ERIK WALDEN AND TAVARES JONES. WHO DO YOU LOOK FOR TO FILL THOSE ROLLS IN 2008?**

First of all, I can not say enough about [Tavares Jones](#) and [Erik Walden](#). They were great players with tremendous attitudes and work ethic. They were both hurt last year and continued to give everything they had to our football team. It won't be easy trying to replace those two guys. I think [Chris McCoy](#) has the athletic ability but does he have the toughness, both mentally and physically? [Gary Tucker](#) is hurt and will be limited in the spring, while [Emmanuel Perez](#) has shown flashes but is still very young. I think we may have to move someone there in the spring. Defensive end is the position on defense right now with very little depth.

**ALEX SUBER IS COMING OFF HIS BEST YEAR STATISTICALLY. TALK ABOUT HIS PROGRESSION AS A DEFENSIVE BACK AFTER BEGINNING HIS CAREER AT RUNNING BACK?**

I thought [Alex Suber](#) had a good year last season. He has bought in now to defensive back and that has helped him. Alex is a great athlete who has good hips and feet and his speed makes up for what he may lack in height. He is a competitor which you have to have at corner because most of the time you are one-on-one out there.

**DAVID DEFATTA HAD A GREAT YEAR PUNTING THE FOOTBALL AND THEN CAME ON AS A PLACEKICKER LATE IN THE YEAR. DO YOU EXPECT HIM TO HANDLE BOTH DUTIES IN 2008?**

David had an excellent year punting the football. He ended up being our placekicker the last couple of games. We signed a kicker and we will let David, Alan, Matt, and the other kickers compete for the job. If I had my wishes I would want one to handle punts, one to handle field goals and extra points, and one to take care of the kickoffs, but that is usually very hard to find.

**YOU ONLY HAVE 11 SENIORS ON THIS YEAR'S TEAM, SO HOW DOES THIS EFFECT LEADERSHIP? DO YOU EXPECT SOME JUNIORS TO STEP UP?**

We basically do not have a senior class. Only having 11 seniors is unheard of on the Division I level. With only 13 juniors it is not

much different the following season. If we were to start August camp today with our signees we would only have 73 on scholarship out of a possible 85. In all, 47 of those 73 players will be freshmen or redshirt freshmen. We are an extremely young football team so developing leadership is critical. I talk to them everyday about the importance of developing and finding the leaders of this team. It is going to have to come from every class. I'm not one that believes you have to be a senior to be a leader. Leadership is earned, not given, and I believe we have some strong leaders in each class.

**ENTERING YEAR THREE, ARE YOU STARTING TO DEVELOP DEPTH AT KEY POSITIONS - WHERE DO YOU FEEL THE MOST COMFORTABLE?**

Going into spring ball the only areas where I feel we have some depth is at fullback, tight end, and defensive tackle. Once our signees get here then I think we will have some added depth in more areas except for defensive end, running back, cornerback, and safety.

**SOME OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS IN THE COUNTRY HAVE STABILITY IN THEIR COACHING STAFF AND YOU HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE TO HAVE THAT CONTINUITY WITH YOUR STAFF. TALK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO MAINTAIN STABILITY?**

We are fortunate to be able to work for a great University. We live in a beautiful city with great schools and a community that offers everything you need. We have a good working environment at Middle Tennessee and I remind our coaches all the time how fortunate we are and they are to be here. We have had two coaches leave in two years and both left for personal and family reasons.

**THIS YEAR'S SCHEDULE IS VERY FAN FRIENDLY WITH 10 OF 12 GAMES BEING PLAYED WITHIN 240 MILES TO GO ALONG WITH A NATIONAL TELEVISION BROADCAST FROM HOME. WHAT IS YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THE 2008 SLATE?**

I like our schedule format better this year. Last season, playing those Saturday then Thursday games were more difficult than people realize. Playing four games in 20 days was very difficult from a mental standpoint as well as physical. Then not having an open date just compounded the difficulty. When our players look back on last year I think they will say they "accomplished an awful lot" considering everything they went through and who they did it against. I still feel we need more home games. We only had four in 2006 (Louisville was in Nashville), five last year, and five scheduled for 2008. I believe our future schedules will give us six home games. I like the fact that we have a couple open dates this season. With our numbers so low, an open date just gives our guys time to get healthy instead of playing through injuries or not at all like last year. I'm glad we get an ESPN game in our stadium. Overall, all of our games should be easy to travel to this year which is always good for our fans and supporters.

**THE TREND IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL IS ALL THE SPREAD OFFENSES. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS POSSIBLY THE NEXT TREND AT THE COLLEGIATE LEVEL?**

Everything goes in cycles. I think the next change will be on defense as people learn to defend the option out of the spread formation. The spread formation on offense has now gone to as much run as pass and I think that is what you will see defenses adjusting to.

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