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## Blue Raiders well represented in Arena Bowl XII

### Saintil, Gant suit up for SaberCats; Littlejohn on IR

MT Media Relations

Middle Tennessee will be well represented in Arena Bowl XII when the event takes place Sunday in New Orleans.

Former Blue Raiders Cleannord Saintil and Julius Gant are both on the active roster for the San Jose SaberCats, while Jeff Littlejohn is also on injured reserve.

Last Saturday in the American Conference Championship Game, Saintil led the SaberCats to an 81-55 victory over Grand Rapids with 11 catches for 113 yards and five touchdowns last Saturday.

San Jose will attempt to win their fourth championship in seven years and second straight Arena Bowl Sunday on ABC (HD) at 2 PM.

The Arena Football League started in 1987 with six teams, and operated in relative obscurity in its early years. The sport has now grown to include 17 teams and an average game attendance of 12,415 in 2007.

The rules of the game are also quite different from the outdoor game. Teams play on a field 85-feet wide and 50-yards long, with 8 yard-long end zones, giving the impression of playing football on a basketball court. Each arena also has nets in each end zone to keep the ball in play.

"It's a smaller area to work with," Saintil said of the differences. "I play more positions, like 'Jack' linebacker and defensive back. I also return kicks and catching them off the net is tough because you never know where it will land."

There are also only eight players on the field as opposed to 11 in the outdoor game. But don't confuse Arena ball with the eight-man football games some small high schools play where running is key, this is a high flying, high scoring game. Scores are routinely in the 50s and 60s and many teams don't use a running back at all.

When asked about being a big part of his teams success, Saintil said, "I just go in and do my job. You can't be an individual. Everybody has to do their job."

And because there are only 24 players on the roster, many of them like Saintil have to play both ways, like one would see in pee-wee or high school.

Even though it's not the NFL, the Arena League still gives the players another chance to continue their careers. "It's an exciting game. You can set goals for yourself and get noticed," Saintil said. In fact some AFL players go on to have very successful NFL careers. Kurt Warner, for example, played for the Iowa Barnstormers before winning the NFL and Super Bowl MVPs for the St. Louis Rams.

But Saintil isn't concerned with other opportunities at this point. His focus, like the other SaberCats, is on the Philadelphia Soul.

The Soul set a lot of team records this season. They won more games than any other team in franchise history (13), set a franchise record with nine wins in a row, and also won the Eastern Division for the first time. They will also be making the franchise's first appearance in the Arena Bowl.

Philadelphia quarterback Matt D'Orazio was also named Champs Sports Quarterback of the Year this season, while only starting 11 of the teams 16 games. He took over for injured QB Tony Graziani in week three.

The SaberCats know first hand just how good this Soul team is. On April 12 Philadelphia beat San Jose 58-57.

"We know we're the underdog even though we won [the championship] last year," Saintil said. "But we'll just have to keep our eye on the prize. Last year was last year and this year is this year. If everybody comes out to play, we'll be alright."



Former Blue Raider receiver Cleannord Saintil had 11 receptions for 113 yards and five TDs in last Saturday's win. (MT) 