Stock optimistic after opening day

Third-year coach pleased with effort, enthusiasm

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee football team opened fall camp in helmets and shorts at the Blue Raider practice complex Saturday afternoon with the emphasis on fundamentals and special teams at the outset.

The first practice of camp lasted almost 2-1/2 hours following a day full of meetings and various film sessions.

Head coach Rick Stockstill was upbeat following the first day of practice as he began what is his third preseason camp leading the Blue Raiders.

"I was very pleased and very excited about their effort and enthusiasm," Stockstill said. "I thought it was a really good day and I'm not one to get overly excited in a shorts practice, but we made some plays out there we haven't made in the past.

"I'm very pleased with the first one and how hard they worked and how hard they competed. We made some plays on both sides of the ball and it was fun to watch them compete out there."

STOCK ON NEWCOMERS: "The newcomer's heads are spinning a little right now. You are telling them where to line up and where to go. They are not in condition as far as where they need to be but that is to be expected. They don't know the tempo a college practice is and how fast it is but we will get them in shape. For the first day out there the new guys did a really nice job."

NEVER GETS EASIER: Redshirt senior quarterback Joe Craddock is entering his fifth preseason camp and although he's a veteran, the signal-caller says it never gets easy.

"I'm not going to say it's easier because you can always get better," Craddock said. "If you ever get

to the point where you feel you are the best you can be then you are not going to get any better or be a good player."

While Craddock says it's not any easier, the knowledge of what to expect does tend to help.

"Being out here five years I know what to expect, how hot it is going to be, how tired it is on your legs and body," Craddock said. "I've done it so many times that it's just a practice to me."

WISER, NOT OLDER: Defensive lineman Trevor Jenkins also is an old hat when it comes to preseason camp as the senior from Macon, Ga., is entering his fourth; however, he doesn't see himself as an old man amongst the newcomers.

Instead, he is a veteran player with knowledge to provide.

"I don't feel older, just wiser," Jenkins said. "I feel I have a legacy to give to these young guys like the veterans showed me when I was a young player getting started. I'm excited about our new players because I see hard workers, great character, and some great players with tremendous athletic ability."

DASHER ON DAY ONE: Sophomore quarterback Dwight Dasher has been around long enough to know camp is going to get more difficult as the team gets deeper into drills; however, the start of his second preseason is much different than the first a year ago.

"I've been through this before so everything is like a cakewalk right now," Dasher said. "It's going to get tougher but today was not bad. Everybody worked hard out here today and we saw some good things for a first practice."

TOP PLAYS: Junior receiver Patrick Honeycutt was solid during the 7-on-7 portion of practice as he caught all four balls thrown his direction. The top play during pass skeleton; however, was a defensive play turned in by the tandem of end Wes Hofacker and safety Denzell Guerra. Dwight Dasher zeroed in on his receiver and tried to rifle a pass through the defenders but Hofacker deflected the pass and Guerra hauled in the first interception of the period. Rod Isaac also had an interception during the period.

"We communicated on defense and we actually had the interceptions during (skeleton) were good because we need to create turnovers," Stockstill said. "The interceptions weren't necessarily the fault of the quarterbacks. Some of it was young receivers running the wrong route but it's still good to get turnovers."

First-year receiver Chris McClover, a transfer from College of Canyons, also had some shining moments. He showed the value of his speed and 6-foot-5 frame to go over defenders and make two outstretched grabs during the 7-on-7 drills.

FAN(S) OF THE DAY: David Bramble and his two sons Baylor (9) and Brady (4) were selected as the Blue Raider Fans of the Day as preseason football practice began at Middle Tennessee Saturday.

Bramble and sons have attended many Blue Raider practices and games through the years but Saturday marked the first time they were able to make the opening workout. They were decked out

in Blue Raider gear and anxious for the upcoming season to open.

Baylor had to be excited that the stands on the practice field are located where the quarterbacks work out. His favorite Blue Raider?

"Dwight Dasher," Baylor quickly answered when asked the question. "He's the quarterback and one time I went to a game and they kept calling his name out for scoring and making plays. I thought that was cool, hearing Dasher over and over. I knew I would remember him. I love coming to the games. It's fun watching them play."

David Bramble is a 1994 graduate of Middle Tennessee and has resided in Murfreesboro since 1990. He is Pastor Associate at Northside Baptist Church. He said the opportunity to attend the first practice presented itself and proved to be a fine way to spend a Saturday afternoon.

"We are Blue Raider die-hards," Bramble said. "We try to come to all the home games. We don't get to travel much because of Sunday but we try to come out as much as we can."

Bramble said the direction of the program and its leadership is reason enough for any Blue Raider fan to get excited and follow the team.

"We are excited about the new year," Bramble said. "I love (Rick Stockstill) and what he is doing for the program. I love the way they are putting money into the programs and upgrading facilities. It's great getting to be out at practice and get this close to the players and coming to the games is great. The games are very family friendly and the Kids Zone in the stadium is a nice addition for families with children. After games we go down by the locker room and the players always say something to the kids, sign their stuff or throw wristbands to them. We love the games."

Unlike his son, Baylor, David says he has no favorite Blue Raiders; rather, he has a team full of favorites.

"I'm just a Blue Raider," David said.

FORMER PLAYERS: Former Blue Raiders Damon Nickson, David Youell and Wes Counts attended the first practice, along with former Blue Raider assistant coach and player Floyd Walker ... Blue Raider color analyst Chip Walters was at practice taking notes on the newcomers and doing his homework for the upcoming broadcasts ... Media members from Channel 2, 4, 5 and Fox were on hand, as well as The Daily News Journal, The Tennessean and Rivals.com.

PERFECT UNDER STOCK For the second year in a row, Middle Tennessee has won the Sun Belt Conference academic award for football as announced by the league office recently. The Blue Raiders won the honor for 2006-07 and now for 2007-08. The team will be honored in a ceremony prior to the Troy game on August 28.

NEXT PRACTICE: The Blue Raiders will practice on Sunday beginning at 4:30 PM.

SEASON TICKETS: 1-888-YES-MTSU OR GoBlueRaiders.com

BLUE RAIDER BLAST: A Blue Raider Blast will be held at in Central Park at The Avenue mall in Murfreesboro, Thursday, August 7, from 5:00-7:00 p.m. Meet coaches, cheerleaders, dance team members, Lightning and more. Representatives from the athletic department will also be on hand

with football schedules, season ticket, and BRAA information. Register to win door prizes, including Blue Raider apparel and merchandise from select Avenue merchants.

FAN/MEDIA DAY: Middle Tennessee's annual Fan/Media Day is scheduled for August 10 at 2:00 PM in Murphy Center. There will be free hot dogs and cokes given away while supplies last, and games for the kids. As always, fans can get player autographs and photos so make plans now to check out this year's team as they prepare for the season-opener on August 28.

FENTON PAYNE AND FRED 5K: On Saturday morning, Aug. 23, the fifth annual Fenton Payne and Fred 5K Run/Walk to take place on the campus of Middle Tennessee. The event will get underway at 7:30 AM with registration at Peck Hall. The cost is $25 with cash prizes going to the winning male and female and the overall masters (40 years and over). There will also be awards to the top three finishers in all divisions, male and female, 9 and under, then 5 year age groups through 80 and over. For more information, contact Mark Hardison at 615-848-9063.

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