

August 5, 2008

Developing depth leading to improved competition

Numbers not quite there, but getting better: Stock

Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Numbers on the Middle Tennessee depth chart still aren't quite where head coach Rick Stockstill would like them to be but it's evident the Blue Raiders are making strides developing quality numbers at certain positions based on the first three practices of preseason camp.

• **Photos:** [Fall Camp Photo Gallery](#)

The addition of quality players in the last two signing classes, coupled with the development and maturity of upperclassmen who have been in the program three or more years, has generated greater competition amongst players at respective positions.

"I think we are getting closer to having more competition at every position and the more competition you have the better your team will be because competition allows you to build a team," Stockstill said. "Even when you are in shorts guys have to compete and you are seeing that in the initial practices."

The Blue Raiders are still thin along the offensive line and at the linebacker positions but the developing depth at quarterback, receiver, running back, tight end, defensive line and in the secondary is generating more spirited practices and helping improve individual development along the way.

"When you reach a point where you have the numbers to have competition at each position that increases the intensity and mental energy that you have during a practice whether you are in shorts, shells, shoulder pads or full gear," Stockstill said. "We are still developing depth but I like where we are with the running backs, tight ends, receivers, quarterbacks, defensive ends and secondary. We still have some positions where there isn't a lot of competition. We are so thin at offensive line and at linebacker that there is not a lot of competition there right now."

BEAT THE HEAT: The Blue Raiders endured the hottest day of fall camp when they took the field Tuesday. The heat index was right at 100 degrees at the outset and remained in the mid-90s throughout. It wasn't as much the temperature that created a seemingly steamier day as it was the humidity, according to athletic trainer Drew Shea. He said the 54 percent humidity was the highest of the early camp dates.

"It was hot out there but it is fall camp and it is hot everywhere right now," Stockstill said. "We try to make sure our players are hydrated and we give them ample breaks throughout practice."

BACK TO NORMAL: Stockstill wasn't as pleased with Monday's practice as he had been the first two days but the veteran coach was happy with how his team bounced back



The Blue Raiders turned up the physicality on Tuesday as they prepare for full pads on Wednesday.

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"It was a little better," Stockstill said. "Our leadership was better and overall it was a better practice than (Monday). We just have to keep improving every day and try to get a little better at something each day and hopefully when (Aug. 28th) gets here we are clicking on all cylinders."

The Blue Raiders were in shells again Tuesday and will don full pads for the first time Wednesday. Although there will be more live work and additional contact, Stockstill said not much will change from the previous three practices just because players are in full pads.

"We will be in full pads and we will do a little tackling, not a lot, because we will try to stay on our feet as much as possible," Stockstill said. "We have to scrimmage and do some live stuff but practice won't be a lot different because we don't cut each other in practice. You can do that in full pads but we don't because we are trying to save our knees and we don't want to get anyone hurt at practice unnecessarily. There will be some live contact but not much. We will try to save that for Saturday."

Junior tailback **Phillip Tanner** said he is one of several Blue Raiders who welcome the first day of pads.

"I think it's exciting because you can really start to get the jitters out," Tanner said. "The first few days you are in shorts and shells and it's all mental. When you get that down you get the pads on and it's time to get the physical part out of the way. We really have not had contact since April so for some people it's going to be getting the cobwebs out."

HAPPY BIRTHDAY BRENT: Stockstill's son, Brent, celebrated his 14th birthday Tuesday and, surprise, surprise, he spent some of it on the football field.

Not at Middle Tennessee with the Blue Raiders, but quarterbacking the Siegel Middle School team in a scrimmage. The young Stockstill is entering eighth grade there this year.

Coach Stockstill said it's tough missing out on activities throughout the year because of the time conflict but he also pointed out it's part of the coaching profession.

"Everybody knows being a college coach is very demanding on your family," coach Stockstill said. "There's not a lot of family time from August to the middle of February so when you do get time you have to take advantage. Last year I saw him play one football game and that was on our open date. You miss a lot of activities and that's hard but it's part of the profession so you have to understand that when you get in it."

Coach Stockstill did say he is fortunate enough to see film of his son's games but he doesn't watch them as a coach; rather, as a dad who is proud of his son.

NEXT PRACTICE: The Blue Raiders will practice on Wednesday beginning at 5:15 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: Meet the 2008 Blue Raiders and coaches at MTSU's Football Fan Day, Sunday, August 10 from 2 PM - 4 PM at the Murphy Center. Autographs, inflatables, hotdogs, and loads of fun will be on hand for all members of the Blue Raider family. Bring your kids and friends to get them ready for the 2008 football season. Show you're Blue

Raider Pride and pick up 2008 football posters, schedule cards, ALL IN bumper stickers and yard signs. Fans who have taken part in the "ADD ONE" campaign by adding new season tickets to their account and fans who are becoming season ticket holders for the first time, can pick up their complimentary BLACK OUT t-shirts and car flags at Fan Day. Blue Raider fans who would like to purchase the official BLACK OUT t-shirt may do so for \$15.00 which will include a ticket to the Sept. 30th game versus FAU.

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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