

August 7, 2008

Blue Raiders brace for added contact

Team's first two-a-day set for Friday

Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee will have its first two-a-day practices of fall camp Friday with the team going in full pads during the morning, followed by what is anticipated to be a lighter workout in the evening.

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

The light workout is not by design; however, as lack of depth and overall numbers across the board has forced head coach Rick Stockstill and staff to take different approaches - especially with the first full-scale scrimmage of the preseason scheduled for Saturday.

"We will have to have a shorter practice in the afternoon because we can't go two hours in the morning and two more hours in the afternoon and expect to get anything out of them for a scrimmage Saturday," Stockstill said. "You have to be smart with what you do."

The Friday morning practice; however, will not be a light workout.

Stockstill indicated the practice will include more full contact, more tackling, more board drills with the offensive and defensive linemen "for toughness," and extensive team work.

ON THE LINE: Defensive lineman [Trevor Jenkins](#) has few critics and that's a good thing because his biggest detractor is on the Blue Raider practice field each time he steps onto it.

No doubt, Jenkins is his biggest critic.

Shortly after coming off the field following a preseason practice this week a member of the Middle Tennessee Athletic Communications staff informed Jenkins he was requested for an interview.

"I don't deserve to be interviewed, not after the practice I had today," Jenkins said. "There's plenty other players out here who deserve to be interviewed more than me. It was not a good day."

Of course Jenkins, a media favorite because of his personality, humor, savvy and the fact he's a darn good player, did the interview and was as forthcoming as always.

It's the type of leadership that has Stockstill beaming about his defensive line during preseason camp.

"When I don't practice well it bothers me and it bothers the coaches," Jenkins said. "The thing I like most about our coaches is they are blunt. They don't sugarcoat things and they don't play stars. (Defensive line coach Les) Herrin knows we are old enough (on the defensive line) to know when we are playing well and we are not so he gives us responsibility to be a man out here. You know if you had a bad day today you better dominate tomorrow."

Jenkins, [Chris McCoy](#), [Dwight Smith](#) and [Wes Hofacker](#) form a solid nucleus along the Blue Raiders' defensive front and Stockstill likes what he sees so far in fall camp.

"Those guys are consistent and they work hard every day," Stockstill said. "They don't have many bad days because they have the right mental approach to practice and getting better, not only individually, but as a group, a unit, and a team."

It's imperative the group remains cohesive and healthy as the Blue Raiders look to overcome the loss of Tavares Jones and Erik Walden to graduation.

WHO'S NO.1?: [Desmond Gee](#) is listed No. 1 atop the Blue Raider depth chart at tailback but junior [Phillip Tanner](#) is a pretty close second. As far as who will be No. 1 when the season opens Aug. 28 against Troy is up in the air, but it's really not a concern.

At least to the two players currently one and two on the depth chart.

"Gee is a wonderful teammate and between us it is not about who is the starter, or who is 1 and who is 2," Tanner said. "We are the tailbacks and we want to win. We will do whatever it takes and if that means Gee making the big run and then I come in to get the first down, or vice versa, we love it. We welcome each other with open arms. We have a pretty good situation."



The Blue Raiders will practice in the morning and again later in the afternoon for their first two-a-day of fall camp. ()

Gee and Tanner have split the reps during the team portion of fall camp with each looking impressive. Sophomore fullback [Marquise Branton](#) has enjoyed some productive runs during team drills and coaches are extremely high on young backs [Jawan Carson](#) and [Tony Smith](#).

Veteran teammates also are high on the youngsters.

"I'm very impressed with them all-around," Tanner said. "I like their will and they want to learn. During individual drills they are jumping to the front and want to get in there. They are asking questions and studying their playbook."

Quarterback [Joe Craddock](#) said the workmanship displayed by Gee and Tanner is evident during workouts.

"Both of those guys run the ball well," Craddock said. "Those two are living up to the challenge right now because they are the top two back there, but the young guys are also coming on strong. I believe our running game is going to open a lot of windows for the passing game this year and that's going to help our offense as a whole."

OFFENSE TAKING SHAPE: Sophomore quarterback [Dwight Dasher](#) has put together three consistent practices and it's no coincidence the offense has followed his lead when the shifty signal caller is on the field.

"I have been feeling better about what I'm doing and the last few days have been good days," Dasher said. "We are still improving each day but I like what I am seeing from our offense. We are doing some good things out here. We are better in the backfield and we have improved ourselves at receiver."

Dasher and Craddock give Middle Tennessee a strong one-two punch under center and Stockstill believes their skills, along with game experience, is a plus.

"You see it at practice, these guys know (Craddock and Dasher) have performed in some pretty intense situations," Stockstill said. "We expect them to be leaders out here and when they have good practices the offense generally follows their lead."

NEXT PRACTICE: The Blue Raiders will practice on Friday at 9:05 AM and again at 4:45 PM.

SEASON TICKETS: 1-888-YES-MTSU OR [GoBlueRaiders.com](#)

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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