Blue Raiders Drop Close One at UL, 24-17

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LAFAYETTE, La. - Middle Tennessee drove to the Louisiana-Lafayette 25-yard line in the final minute looking for a game-tying score, but the Ragin' Cajuns intercepted a pass at the goal line to hold on for a 24-17 Sun Belt Conference victory here Saturday night at Cajun Field.

Penalties and three costly turnovers proved too much for the Blue Raiders (1-2, 0-1 Sun Belt) in their second straight loss. UL took advantage of the opportunities, winning its conference opener for the first time since 1994.

UL scored on the opening possession of the contest for a quick 7-0 lead just over two minutes into the game, but the Raiders tied the contest with 5:59 left in the first quarter on a 15-yard TD reception by Pierre Ingram, his first career TD catch.

Eugene Gross gave Middle Tennessee a 14-7 edge with a one-yard touchdown run, his fourth rushing score of the season, with 2:42 left in the half. But the Cajuns knotted the contest at halftime with a 10-yard TD pass from Jerry Babb to B.J. Crist in the final minute.

Babb connected with Xavier Campbell midway through the third quarter to give UL a 21-14 lead, and the Cajuns added a field goal less than a minute into the fourth period for a 24-14 advantage.

Blue Raider Colby Smith connected on a 37-yard field goal midway through the final period, cutting the UL lead to 24-17. The Raiders were moving again later in the quarter before Gross fumbled after a reception, but the Middle Tennessee defense stiffened and the Cajuns missed a field goal from 44 yards.

The Blue Raiders then marched to the UL 25 in the final three-plus minutes, but Clint Marks pass was intercepted at the goal line in the final minute, preserving the win for the Cajuns.

Marks completed 35-of-46 passes for 242 yards and one touchdown. Junior Cleannord Saintil caught a career-high nine balls for 61 yards, while senior Kerry Wright had eight catches for 76 yards to move to third all-time on the receptions list at Middle Tennessee.

Penalties proved costly for Middle Tennessee in the contest, with more than 70 yards penalized against the club in the third quarter alone. The Blue Raiders were penalized 13 times for 111 yards overall in the contest.

Middle Tennessee stays on the road in Sun Belt play next week, heading to North Texas next Saturday in a 6 p.m. CT start at Fouts Field in Denton, Texas.

POSTGAME NOTES MIDDLE TENNESSEE AT LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE SEPT. 25, 2004; LAFAYETTE, LA

MT IN SBC PLAY: With the loss to Louisiana-Lafayette, Middle Tennessee fell to 2-2 in Sun Belt Conference openers and 4-6 all-time in league road games. Overall, the Blue Raiders are now 11-9 in Sun Belt Conference games.

WRIGHT MOVES UP LIST: WR Kerry Wright moved into third place on the all-time receptions list at Middle Tennessee when he reeled in eight catches for 76 yards against Louisiana-Lafayette. Wright, who entered the ULL contest with 109 receptions, now has 117 catches for his career and surpassed Demetric Mostiller and Herbert Owenby for third all-time. The senior has 26 receptions this season for 316 yards in three games.

FIRSTS FOR INGRAM: WR Pierre Ingram, who made his first collegiate reception last week against Florida Atlantic, registered his first career start and first career touchdown grab tonight against the Ragin' Cajuns. Ingram, who had a 36-yard catch for a near touchdown last week, hauled in a 15-yard reception for the Blue Raiders' first score in the first quarter, his only catch of the game.

SAINTIL SETS PERSONAL MARK: WR Cleannord Saintil set his career-best in pass receptions for the second straight game. The junior reeled in nine catches for 61 yards to run his season total of receptions to 17.

MARKS SETS CAREER-HIGH AGAIN: Sophomore QB Clint Marks set career-highs for completions and attempts for the third straight week, completing 35-of-46 passes for 242 yards and one touchdown. Marks was 21-of-28 in the second half.

THREE IN A ROW: For the third week in a row, Middle Tennessee registered a blocked kick when Pierre Ingram leaped high in the second quarter to tip a ULL field goal. All three blocks have been field goals this season with Jerry Vanderpool getting one at Akron and Sean Mosley recording his career first last week against Florida Atlantic. Overall, the Blue Raiders have blocked a total of 15 kicks under Andy McCollum.

FAKE PUNT: Middle Tennessee called its first fake punt of the season against ULL and it was successful in the second quarter. Punter Colby Smith faked a fourth-and-one play and ran 22 yards to the ULL 25-yard line. The drive, however, stalled and Smith later missed his first field goal of the year from 40 yards.

THIRD QUARTER WOES: Middle Tennessee's third quarter problems continued in the contest at Louisiana-Lafayette. Entering the game, the Blue Raiders had been outscored 28-0 in the third period and the Ragin' Cajuns won the third quarter battle tonight 7-0. For the year, MT has been outscored in the third stanza, 35-0.

TIDBITS: For the third straight game, Middle Tennessee started a different player at running back (Terry Jackson) ... RB Terry Jackson received his first collegiate start against ULL ... DB DeMarcus Green saw action on defense for the first time this season ... PK Colby Smith missed his first field goal of the year when he was wide on a 40-yarder in the second quarter ... Kerry Wright has now caught at least two passes in 15 straight games ... Eugene Gross' second quarter touchdown was his fourth rushing score of the year and the fifth for the Blue Raiders this season.

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