

Blue Raider comeback falls short

Troy holds off Middle Tennessee, 31-17, in opener

August 28, 2008 · MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee gave Troy and the sixth-largest crowd in Floyd Stadium history a big finish but the Blue Raiders had too big of a hole to dig out of and ended up dropping a 31-17 setback in front of 22,307 in the opener for both teams Thursday night.

Trailing 24-3 entering the final quarter, Middle Tennessee scored consecutive touchdowns to close to within 24-17 with 6:44 remaining and the Blue Raiders twice had opportunities to get off the field but Troy converted consecutive third-down plays to keep its drive alive and eventually scored the game-clinching touchdown on DuJuan Harris' 13-yard run.

Troy had 300 yards total offense in the conference opener for both teams, including sophomore

quarterback Jamie Hampton completing 17-of-28 passes for 136 yards and a touchdown. The Blue Raiders forced four turnovers - three fumbles and one interception - however, the offense only converted the four miscues into seven points.

Anthony Glover, Desmond Gee and Chris McCoy each had fumble recoveries, and Danny Carmichael and Alex Suber were who credited with forced fumbles. Ivon Hickman hauled in an interception. Jeremy Kellem led the stop squad with seven total tackles.

Middle Tennessee managed 284 yards total offense but it had just 84 on the ground; however, much of the lost yardage on the ground was the result of sacks and tackles for losses against the quarterbacks, who combined for minus 37 yards rushing. Phillip Tanner led the Blue Raider ground



game with 61 yards on 16 carries, including a 3-yard touchdown, and Desmond Gree finished with 60 yards on 18 carries.

Quarterback Joe Craddock was 20-of-32 for 200 yards and a 46-yard touchdown pass to freshman Malcolm Beyah. Craddock also threw an interception. Much has been made of Middle Tennessee's young receiving corps and the unit lived up to the billing in the opener. Beyah had two receptions for 44 yards, and freshman pass catcher Sancho McDonald led all receivers with six receptions for 65 yards. Michael Cannon and Wes Caldwell enjoyed carry-over from a great fall camp - combining for nine receptions and 72 yards.

Troy got on the scoreboard first when it converted the game's first turnover into points. Linebacker Boris Lee intercepted Craddock and returned the pigskin to the 4, where Hampton scored from one play later to stake the visitor's to a 7-0 lead early in the first quarter.

The Blue Raiders came back with a 15-play, 75-yard drive and faced first-and-goal at the 10, but they had to settle for Alan Gendreau's 22-yard field goal to close the margin to within 7-3 with 5:59 remaining in the first quarter.

Troy scored 17 unanswered points to go up 24-3 in the third quarter before the Blue Raiders mounted a rally. Beyah hauled in a 46-yard pass from Craddock to narrow the gap to 24-10 with 9:04 remaining and, following a Glover fumble recovery, Tanner scored from the 3 to pull Middle Tennessee to within 24-17 with 6:44 remaining.

Middle Tennessee had two chances to get off the field on the next Troy drive but the Trojans converted two crucial third downs to keep drives alive and eventually scored the game-clinching touchdown with 2:32 remaining.

Perhaps the biggest problem for Middle Tennessee was its inability to score in the red zone. The Blue Raiders had the ball inside the Troy 10 three times and came away with just three points. Once, they fumbled in the red zone and they also turned the ball over on downs at the 1 when the game in the balance.

The Blue Raiders return to the gridiron when they play host to Maryland Saturday.

POSTGAME QUOTES

HEAD COACH RICK STOCKSTILL

Opening comments:

"We had opportunities tonight and just didn't take advantage but I told our players after the game that I've never been more proud of a bunch of guys as I am them tonight. They played their guts out. We just let a few opportunities get away. If we keep practicing the way we have been and keep working, they will have a chance to beat a good football team."

On the running game:

"I thought we ran the ball pretty good in the open field. (Gee and Tanner) had some nice runs in there and I thought those two ran the ball extremely hard. We were not very productive inside the 5 a couple of times and that has to be corrected. I think we will get better as we play with that offensive line. We had three linemen out there tonight who were playing in their first college game. We do need to get more production out of the quarterback running the ball and we have to get more production in the red zone running the ball but they just whipped us. Our offensive line will keep

coming around, I'm certain of that."

On the defense:

"I thought our defense was outstanding tonight and I thought the unit played extremely well. We put them on the short field a few times with turnovers, offensively, and that hurt us. For the most part, when we gave up points the defense made them work for it. Their last drive, we have a chance to get an interception at midfield and dropped it, and on third-down and long we had a chance to get off the field and they break a tackle and go down and score."

On the young receiving corps:

"Very, very pleased with those guys and they are only going to get better. On offense tonight we had three offensive linemen and three receivers out there who were playing their first college game. We will keep improving."

DL Trevor Jenkins

Overall assessment of the game:

"Troy played very well tonight and I take my hat off to them. Give them credit, they got it done. Our defense played with heart and passion, but we just need to be more disciplined."

On the frustration of the loss:

"I think we really beat ourselves tonight and that's frustrating. Troy's offensive line did a good job protecting quarterback (Jamie Hampton). We were able to get pressure on him but he would manage to find ways to get out of trouble and make plays. He did a good job leading their team tonight."

RB Phillip Tanner

On Troy's defense:

"Troy's defense is a very physical bunch. They are a very fast defense and they really aggravated me and (Desmond) Gee. We were a shoe-string away from breaking a big run a couple times and just couldn't make a man miss. That's something we will have to work on next week."

On the loss to Troy:

"It's frustrating because we had chances and didn't take advantage of those. I believe we had the ball inside the 10 twice and didn't score but you have to give Troy credit because they buckled down and didn't let us in but that's when we also have to dig a little deeper and find a way."

POSTGAME NOTES

FIRST TIME STARTERS: Middle Tennessee had eight players to make their first collegiate starts against Troy. OT Mike Williams, OG Colin Boss, WR Michael Cannon, WR Wes Caldwell, DE Terans Goodson, DB Ted Riley, DT Dwight Smith and LB Ivon Hickmon all started for the first time on Thursday night.

CAREER NIGHTS FOR MCDONALD, CALDWELL: Freshman Sancho McDonald and sophomore Wes Caldwell turned in career nights in the receiving department for the Blue Raiders against Troy. McDonald, who made the move to receiver from quarterback late in preseason camp, hauled in six passes for 65 yards in his first collegiate game. Caldwell, who had just one reception as a freshman, turned in four catches for 34 yards against the Trojans.

FIRST TIME PLAYERS: Middle Tennessee had 15 players compete in their first game as a Blue

Raider against Troy. Following is a list of those players: Malcolm Beyah, Colin Boss, Derek Cardaci, Jawan Carson, Derrick Crumpton, Alan Gendreau, Terans Goodson, Eldred King, Jamari Lattimore, Sancho McDonald, Byron McLeod, Brandon McLeroy, Chris McClover, Marcus Udell and Mike Williams.

TOP TEN CROWD: Tonight's announced attendance of 22,307 goes down as the sixth largest in Floyd Stadium history. Under Rick Stockstill, the Blue Raiders have produced five of the top 11 attendance games.

HICKMON GETS PICK: Ivon Hickmon, who made his first collegiate start at linebacker against Troy, recorded his first career interception when he stepped in front of a Jamie Hampton pass in the third quarter. It was the first interception by a Blue Raider linebacker since Justin Rainey collected one against Troy in 2006.

QUICK HITTERS: The Blue Raiders kicked off their 94th season of football against Troy ... DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-best 26th straight start for the Blue Raiders ... DB Alex Suber recorded his first career full sack against Troy (the junior had a half sack in 2007) ... Joe Craddock recorded the 13th touchdown pass of his career when he hit freshman Malcolm Beyah on a 46-yard strike in the fourth quarter ... FS Anthony Glover recorded his first career fumble recovery late in the fourth quarter against Troy ... Phillip Tanner collected his fifth career rushing touchdown when he barreled in from three yards out in the fourth quarter.

Printed on July 26, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/33715>