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Blue Raiders come up a yard short

Wild final minute highlights hard-fought game

Athletic Communications

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LEXINGTON, Ky. - Middle Tennessee came within inches of pulling off its second straight major upset - literally - before falling one yard short in a 20-14 loss at Commonwealth Stadium.

There were two major scares for Kentucky in the wild final 10 seconds but the Wildcats dodged each. The first came when [Alex Suber](#) blocked Lones Seiber's field goal attempt at the 28. [Ted Riley](#) scooped up the pigskin and returned it to the Wildcat 38 with eight seconds remaining; however, a penalty for illegal block in the back that was viewed as questionable by the Blue Raider sideline moved the ball back to the Blue Raiders' 38.

With eight seconds remaining the Blue Raiders had a final chance at the upset and almost pulled it off in dramatic fashion when quarterback [Joe Craddock](#) fired a Hail Mary downfield. The ball was tipped by [Malcolm Beyah](#) and caught by [Eldred King](#) at the 3. King tried to shake the defenders and gained two yards before Robbie McAtee finally hauled him down inside the 1 as the final horn sounded and the Blue Raiders had fallen just short in agonizing fashion.

Middle Tennessee carried a 14-10 lead into the fourth quarter but Kentucky scored 10 unanswered points to escape the Blue Raider upset bid. Senior quarterback [Joe Craddock](#) was 21-of-37 for 355 yards and two touchdowns in the loss. Freshman receiver [Malcolm Beyah](#) and junior [Desmond Gee](#) were the beneficiaries of the air attack. Beyah had five catches for 117 yards and Gee had three catches for 106 yards and a score. King had a career high six catches for 85 yards. Beyah has scored a touchdown in each of his first three college games.

The Blue Raider defense was solid once again, limiting Kentucky from big plays and allowing just one sustained touchdown drive; however, it was not enough in the setback.

Middle Tennessee took the early lead when Craddock connected with Gee for a 62-yard scoring strike. [Alan Gendreau](#)'s extra point staked the Blue Raiders to a 7-0 cushion with 9:21 remaining in the first quarter. It was the first touchdown allowed by Kentucky in two-plus games after the Wildcats' highly-regarded defense had held their previous two opponents to a combined five points.

The Blue Raider defense was solid in holding the Wildcats to three-and-out on their first two possessions but the Middle Tennessee offense made a costly mistake on its third possession when [Sancho McDonald](#) fumbled the handoff from Craddock on an end around. Kentucky recovered at the Blue Raider 11 and scored three plays later when Mike Hartline threw his first collegiate touchdown - a 1-yard pass to Maurice Grinter to even the score 7-7 with 3:48 remaining.

Middle Tennessee was in perfect position to regain the lead after Craddock connected with [Malcolm Beyah](#) for a spectacular 52-yard reception to the Kentucky 4, where the Blue Raiders faced first-and-goal midway through the second quarter. Kentucky's defense held and Gendreau came on to attempt a chip shot 24-yard field goal but his first try on the road in front of a partisan crowd went off the right upright and the Blue Raiders were denied.

Junior kicker Lones Seiber provided Kentucky with its first lead late in the first half when he followed Middle Tennessee's missed field goal with a 40-yard put to put the Wildcats in front 10-7 with 4:11 remaining. The Blue Raiders did catch a break on the drive when receiver E.J. Adams caught a 23-yard touchdown pass from Hartline but it was negated for illegal touching and the Wildcats had to settle for the three-point try. The remainder of the half was dominated by each defense as the teams battled to a 10-7 halftime score.

After giving Kentucky an earlier gift-wrapped touchdown following a fumble early in the game, Middle Tennessee's defense put its offense in great position when [Brandon Perry](#) pounced on a Hartline fumble and the Blue Raiders regained possession at the Wildcats' 34.



Eldred King gives it all he has on the final play to get into the endzone. ()

Two plays later Craddock found Beyah in the middle of the field for a 22-yard score and the Blue Raiders were back on top, 14-10, after Gendreau's extra point with 7:26 remaining in the third quarter.

The score remained in Middle Tennessee's favor into the fourth quarter until Kentucky finally regained the advantage on Derrick Locke's 6-yard touchdown reception from Hartline with 12:20 remaining. Locke's first career touchdown capped an eight-play, 57-yard drive and provided the Wildcats a 17-14 advantage.

After Middle Tennessee was forced to punt Kentucky drove to the Blue Raider 8 but the Big Blue Stop Squad came through again and held Seiber to a 25-yard field goal that gave the Wildcats a 20-14 lead with 6:37 remaining. The stop was huge as it kept the game within one possession and gave Middle Tennessee a chance to pull off its second big shocker in as many weeks.

After a Craddock interception, the Blue Raider defense held Kentucky to three-and-out and the offense regained possession at its 8 with one final chance to pull off the upset. Two short passes and an incomplete set up fourth-and-1 at the 17 and [Phillip Tanner](#) was stopped short of the first-down marker as Kentucky escaped with the narrow win.

The Blue Raiders return to Sun Belt Conference action when they play at Arkansas State next Saturday.

POSTGAME NOTES

GEE COMES UP BIG: Junior [Desmond Gee](#) scored his first touchdown of the season against Kentucky and it could not have come at a better time. Gee took a 15-yard out and turned it into a 62-yard touchdown pass for his first score since hauling in a 66-yard pass from Craddock against ULM last year. It marked Gee's fourth career score of longer than 50 yards.

GEE TOPS 100: [Desmond Gee](#) recorded his third career 100-yard receiving game and he reached the milestone in the first half against Kentucky. Gee finished the game with three catches for 106 yards and one touchdown. It was the fifth 100-yard receiving game under Rick Stockstill and the first against a non-conference opponent. Gee owns three of the five.

CRADDOCK TOPS 300 ... AGAIN: Quarterback [Joe Craddock](#) topped the 300-yard passing mark for the second time in his career and he surpassed 200 yards for the third time this season. The last time Middle Tennessee had a quarterback start a season with three straight games over 200 yards was Clint Marks in 2004. Craddock, who had 290 passing yards in his last visit to the Bluegrass state against Louisville last year, finished with 355 passing yards.

BIG PLAY BEYAH: He has only played three college games but true freshman receiver [Malcolm Beyah](#) is quickly becoming a big play threat for the Blue Raiders. In the first game he hauled in a 46-yard pass for a touchdown, then came back the next week to record a 56-yard scoring strike. Against Kentucky in his first road game, Beyah brought in a 52-yard pass when he leaped over a defender and scampered to the 9-yard line. Beyah finished with a career-best 117 yards receiving and a touchdown and now has a score in all three games this year.

SUBER GETS BLOCK: DB [Alex Suber](#) recorded his first career block when he came around the right end to reject a 28-yard attempt with less than 25 second to play to keep the Blue Raiders' hope alive. It was the 24th blocked kick in the FBS era for Middle Tennessee and the fourth under Rick Stockstill. The last blocked field goal by the Blue Raiders came in 2006 when Justin Rainey recorded one against Troy.

QUICK HITTEES: DT [Trevor Jenkins](#) made his team-best 28th straight start ... FS [Kevin Brown](#) made his first collegiate start tonight against Kentucky ... TB [Phillip Tanner](#) made just his second career start in the game against UK ... TE [Gene Delle Donne](#) made his first career ... P [David DeFatta](#) has now placed at least one punt inside the opponents 20-yard line in 15 straight games ... Walk-on [Sherman Neal](#) played in his first career game tonight as a member of the punt block team ... [D.D. Kyles](#) made his first career reception in the second quarter against UK ... QB [Joe Craddock](#) has hit at least seven different receivers in all three games this year and he hit nine against UK ... DT [Brandon Perry](#) made his first career fumble recovery in the third quarter ... Middle Tennessee fell to 3-15 against the SEC since turning FBS in 1999.

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