Blue Raiders suffer Sun Belt road setback

Arkansas State takes 31-14 win

September 20, 2008 · MT Athletic Communications

JONESBORO, Ark. - Middle Tennessee has dominated the football series against Arkansas State with wins in eight of the first nine meetings; however, the 10th gridiron clash between the teams is one the Blue Raiders would likely prefer to forget.

Arkansas State (3-1, 1-0) was too much for Middle Tennessee in a 31-14 win on Homecoming at ASU Stadium here Saturday night. The Red Wolves dominated from the outset and took control in the first half on the way to a 17-0 halftime advantage. They provided the dagger when quarterback Corey Leonard threw his third touchdown of the game - a 2-yard pass to David Johnson - to cap a 13-play, 74-yard drive that consumed 8:35 on the opening second half drive.

Leonard threw a pair of first-half scores. His 17-yard pass to tailback Reggie Arnold started the scoring with 326 remaining in the first quarter. Josh Arauco added a 35-yard field goal to extend the lead to 10-0 with 8:30 remaining in the first half before Leonard found Johnson for a 14-yard scoring strike with 36 seconds remaining before intermission.

Middle Tennessee (1-3, 0-2) finally got on the scoreboard late in the third quarter when Phillip Tanner plunged in from the 2 to cap a nine-play, 76-yard drive and narrow the margin to 24-7 with 2:19 remaining in the third quarter.

Any hopes of a comeback were quickly dashed as Arkansas State methodically answered the Blue Raider scoring drive with a nine-play, 88-yard drive capped with Derek Lawson's 2-yard run with less than 13 minutes remaining for a 31-7 advantage.

The Blue Raiders wouldn't go quietly. They pulled to within 31-14 when Dwight Dasher connected with Patrick Honeycutt for a 3-yard touchdown pass with 9:17 remaining. Honeycutt turned in a career-best performance with a personal-best 11 receptions for 94 yards and his first score of the season and second of his career.

What had been an efficient Middle Tennessee offense struggled in its first Sun Belt road encounter of the season. The Blue Raiders had 315 yards total offense led by quarterback Joe Craddock's 25-of-35 for 268 yards passing. The unit had two first-half interceptions with Craddock and Dwight Dasher each throwing one.

Middle Tennessee squandered several first-half opportunities. The Blue Raiders had the ball at midfield or the plus side of the field three times in the first half and failed to get any points out of opportunities generally set up by excellent special teams play and near touchdown-breaking returns from Desmond Gee.

Gee's first long return to the Blue Raider 48 was negated when Dasher was intercepted at the Arkansas State 7. Another long return didn't result in points after Craddock was picked off at the Arkansas State 3 on a second-and-8 from the ASU 18.

The Blue Raiders finally got their offense untracked in the second half but the deficit was already too large.

Middle Tennessee will return to action when it plays host to Florida Atlantic in the "Blackout Night" game, Sept. 30.

HONEYCUTT SETS CAREER HIGH: Wide receiver Patrick Honeycutt hauled in a career-high 11 receptions for 94 yards and his second career touchdown in the loss to ASU. Honeycutt, whose previous high was six catches against FAU in the 2007 season opener, came into the game with just three receptions on the season.

DASHER GETS TD TOSS: For the first time since getting hurt in last year's road game at North Texas, QB Dwight Dasher threw a touchdown pass when he connected with Patrick Honeycutt in the fourth quarter. It was Dasher's 10th career TD strike and his first pass completion since Nov. 10, 2007 against ULL.

TANNER BREAKS SCORING DROUGHT: Junior Phillip Tanner took a pitch from Joe Craddock late in the third quarter to score the Blue Raiders' first points of the game. It was Tanner's team-leading third rushing touchdown of the season and the seventh of his career.

OVER 200 AGAIN: Despite a slow start, QB Joe Craddock topped the 200-yard passing mark for the fourth straight game and the sixth of his career. Craddock completed 25-of-35 passes for 268 yards. The last Blue Raider to start a season with four straight games over 200 yards in the passing department was Clint Marks in 2004 and he did it in six straight.

STREAK IS OVER: Middle Tennessee came into tonight's game having won five straight over the

Red Wolves and eight of nine all-time meetings but that all came to an end with ASU's 31-14 win on Homecoming against the Blue Raiders. Middle Tennessee now leads the all-time series, 8-2, with both losses coming in Jonesboro.

SACK STREAK ENDS: Middle Tennessee's young offensive line had gone two straight games without giving up a sack but the streak came to an end against ASU. In the closing seconds of the first half, Joe Craddock was sacked near mid-field. The line in the game during the sack consisted of three freshmen.

FORGETTABLE FIRST HALF: Normally a team that wins the turnover battle, Middle Tennessee struggled in that category against ASU. The Blue Raiders threw two interceptions in ASU territory to end scoring threats, made just two of seven third down conversions, and gave up 249 total yards. One bright spot is that the Blue Raider defense allowed just 28 rushing yards to a team that came in averaging 295.7 yards a game on the ground.

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee dropped its conference road record under Rick Stockstill to 6-3 . DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-best 29th straight start . Spike McDaniel played in his first collegiate game as a member of the kickoff return team . Andrew Banks and Darin Davis played in their first collegiate games tonight as a member of the punt block team . P David DeFatta downed a punt in the second quarter to the 1-yard line (thanks to a great play by Jawan Carson) to give him at least one in 16 straight games . Middle Tennessee has now scored just three points in the first half of two SBC games . MT is now 7-50 during the FBS era when trailing at the half . The crowd of 24,256 was the sixth largest in ASU Stadium history.

Printed on May 24, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/34199