FAU left stunned following 'Miracle in Murfreesboro'

Blue Raiders rally for 14-13 win in front of third-largest crowd in Floyd Stadium history

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee put together a remarkable comeback when Joe Craddock marched the Blue Raiders 65 yards with no timeouts to rally them to a dramatic 14-13 win against Florida Atlantic in front of 25,766 and an ESPN2 national television audience at Floyd Stadium Tuesday.

Craddock did his best John Elway impersonation by leading the game-winning drive under extreme circumstances and Middle Tennessee demonstrated its tremendous character when all seemed to be lost on a festive evening in Murfreesboro.

However, the miracle men would not be denied. Trailing 13-7 Middle Tennessee began its final drive at its 35 with 1:15 remaining and no timeouts. Craddock completed 4-of-6 passes for 65 yards on the game-winning drive, including the striking 32-yard aerial to Beyah who rose above three defenders and secured the ball with no time on the clock for one of the most remarkable finishes in Floyd Stadium history.

Beyah, who had two catches for 59 yards on the final drive, tied the game 13-13 with his

breathtaking grab and freshman Alan Gendreau, who was frozen twice by consecutive Florida Atlantic timeouts, nailed the extra point to send the remaining Blue Raider faithful into a frenzy as the students stormed the field.

Middle Tennessee (2-3, 1-2) kept alive its hopes for a Sun Belt Conference championship and a second bowl appearance in three years with the astonishing finish to stun the defending league champions and preseason favorites in agonizing fashion. Craddock finished the night 24-of-35 for 268 yards, no interceptions and two fourth-quarter touchdowns on his way to his fifth straight game of throwing for more than 200 yards.

Junior receiver Patrick Honeycutt had nine receptions for 113 yards and a 25-yard touchdown pass and Beyah finished with five grabs for 90 yards as Middle Tennessee won with 323 yards total offense.

The Blue Raider defense was the story of the game. The Big Blue stop squad was phenomenal, led by Danny Carmichael and Ivon Hickmon's combined 19 tackles. Carmichael had 10 tackles including one sack, two tackles for loss, and two pass break-ups. Hickmon had nine tackles, two for loss, and forced a fumble. Sophomore Jeremy Kellem was a one-man wrecking crew with one forced fumble, one fumble recovery and an interception. Kevin Brown also had an interception as the defense forced four turnovers and had a riveting goal-line stand.

It was the defense that kept the Blue Raiders in the game and in dramatic fashion it was the offense that carried it home.

Middle Tennessee scored all of its points in the final 5:22 of the game after looking lethargic offensively until that point; however, when the game was on the line the Blue Raiders took full advantage.

Craddock capped a 7-play, 71-yard drive with his 25-yard strike to Honeycutt with 5:22 remaining and the defense had to make one final stand. The unit didn't keep Florida Atlantic (1-4, 0-1) off the scoreboard but it did keep the Owls out of the end zone, limiting them to a 25-yard field goal with 1:15 remaining to set up one of the more memorable drives in recent history.

HEAD COACH RICK STOCKSTILL

Opening comments:

"I'm fired up. We didn't play very well offensively and we made stupid mistakes, especially in the first half, but our guys never quit and they kept playing. It may not have been pretty but it was effective and that's what happens when you keep playing. I hope people realize this team is going to fight you for 60 minutes. We may not always do it right or make every play but they are going to play their guts out for you the entire time. That was the case."

On the defense:

"I thought our defense played exceptionally well the whole game. To hold that club to 13 points, they were defending champs and preseason pick No. 1, so to play as well as we did defensively they deserve a great deal of credit. They didn't play great either but they played well enough to get it done. Our coaches did a great job of continuing to find a way to make something happen. Our players kept believing and kept fighting and got it done."

On the final play:

"It was the exact play we ran at Kentucky. Joe gave us a chance. A lot of people probably don't realize it but Malcolm and those guys are running hard down the field the whole time, out of breath, and Malcolm went up and made a great, great play - a game-winning play."

On the crowd:
"I thought our crowd was the best it's been since I've been here. Our crowd was excellent, they were into it, and they came early and made a difference. It was a great college atmosphere. I'm glad they all got to be part of it because it was a fantastic finish. It was great to see all those fans in the stands in their black and really buying into this Blackout promotion. It was a good night and a fun game for ESPN."

S Jeremy Kellem
On the defense not letting up:
"Our defensive coordinator, Manny Diaz, reminded us that last week we gave up too many points in the second half to allow us to win so we wanted to make sure that we didn't do that this game. We wanted to keep them off the board and give our offense a chance. We knew they would get it going and they did when it mattered."

On the Blackout Night:
"We look at ESPN, like Georgia when they had their Blackout Night, and that gets you fired up. Then we came up for the Raider Walk and saw all the black, then we got in the stadium and it was filled with black. That really gets you going. Our defense was ready to play and we really wanted this for our team and for our fans."

QB Joe Craddock
On the defense and the comeback:
"Our defense was amazing and played a great game to keep us in there. Our offense was terrible tonight. Terrible probably is not a good word for it. It was worse than that, but our defense kept us in it. I guess you can call us the 'Miracle Men.' I can just say fans should never give up on us because we find a way to make it interesting."

On the mood at halftime:
"I told our offense at the half that we were only down 10 and we had played the worst 30 minutes of football I had ever seen in my life. That tells you a lot about our defense. We never quit and when we got it the last time we knew we had to take advantage of this opportunity. We believe in one another and it showed tonight."

On the fans and "Blackout Night."
"I'm not sure why our fans stuck with us tonight because we didn't play well on the road the last two games but they have bought in and they have been so supportive of us. Blackout was a huge success and these fans made a difference. I'm glad we could deliver them a win. To go 0-2 on the road and come home to this type of crowd, I can't thank them enough. It says a lot about our fans."

NOTES
THE FINAL DRIVE: Trailing 13-7, Middle Tennessee started its final drive at the 35-yard line with 1:15 to play in the game and out of time outs. Joe Craddock completed 4 of 6 passes for 65 yards, including a dramatic 32-yard strike to Malcolm Beyah for the deciding touchdown with no time remaining. Beyah, who had two catches for 59 yards on the final drive, reached high among three

defenders and pulled it down in the endzone.

CRADDOCK OVER 200: Senior Joe Craddock made it five games in a row throwing for more than 200 yards when he connected on 24 of 35 passes for 268 yards and two touchdowns in a dramatic win over FAU. Craddock has now thrown for more than 200 yards seven times in his career.

HONEYCUTT SETS CAREER-HIGH: Fresh off a career-best 11-catch game at Arkansas State, Patrick Honeycutt followed with nine receptions for a personal-best 113 yards and a touchdown against FAU. It marked the seventh 100-yard receiving game under Rick Stockstill and the third this season.

BIG CROWD: Middle Tennessee's announced crowd of 25,766 against FAU goes down as the third largest in school history.

NATIONAL BROADCAST: Tonight's game against FAU marked the eighth nationally televised game involving the Blue Raiders and the first-ever from Floyd Stadium on ESPN or ESPN2. Prior to Rick Stockstill's arrival, the Blue Raiders had played in just two **nationally televised games and the FAU contest was the sixth under the third-year coach.**

ONE MAN WRECKING CREW: Sophomore Jeremy Kellem was responsible for three turnovers against FAU. Kellem picked off a Rusty Smith pass in the first quarter for his first interception of the season and later added his second career fumble recovery in the second quarter. Kellem, who now has four career interceptions, forced a fumble in the fourth quarter that was recovered by the Blue Raiders.

QUICK HITTERS: DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-best 30th straight start ... QB Dwight Dasher made his second career reception tonight ... True freshman Brandon McLeroy made his first career start at right guard against FAU ... P David DeFatta has now placed at least one punt inside the 20-yard line in 17 straight games ... FB Jacob Longoria had his first rushing attempts of the season against FAU ... Middle Tennessee's longest play on offense the first half was 12 yards ... Kevin Brown recorded his first interception of the season and the second of his career during the third quarter against FAU ... Joe Craddock recorded his 18th career touchdown pass against FAU.

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