FIU turns back Blue Raiders, 31-21

Tanner bright spot in setback

October 11, 2008 · MT Athletic Communications

MIAMI, Fla. - Middle Tennessee's hopes of a push toward the Sun Belt Conference championship in the second half of the season took a decisive blow here Saturday night when FIU dealt the Blue Raiders a 31-21 setback at FIU Stadium.

The Blue Raiders dropped to 2-4 overall and 1-3 in the league race while surprising FIU remained unbeaten in SBC play at 2-0 and evened its overall record at 3-3.

Middle Tennessee never got on track offensively in the opening half and things worsened in the second half when the Golden Panthers finally started gaining yards in chunks against a Blue Raider defense that had been on the field a majority of the first half.

Quarterbacks Joe Craddock and Dwight Dasher combined for three interceptions in the setback with Craddock being guilty of two and Dasher throwing one as the offense struggled to put together sustained drives.

Junior tailback Phillip Tanner was a bright spot. He scored both of Middle Tennessee's touchdowns and accounted for 79 of the team's 171rushing yards. Craddock was 7-of-12 for 25 yards and two interceptions and Dasher was 7-of-15 for 47 yards and one interception.

Jeremy Kellem led Middle Tennessee's defense with 11 tackles and linebacker Danny Carmichael totaled nine stops.

It started well enough for the Blue Raiders as they got on the scoreboard first when Alan Gendreau booted a career-best 36-yard field goal to stake the Blue Raiders to a 3-0 lead on their opening possession. Gendreau's kick capped seven-play, 31-yard drive after the Blue Raiders held FIU to three-and-out on its first possession.

From there it was the defensive battle that was anticipated deep into the first half and the defense almost gave the Blue Raiders an even greater lead when corner Alex Suber curtailed a FIU scoring drive with his second interception of the season. The junior defensive back intercepted quarterback Paul McCall on a third-and-12 play at the 30 and returned it 60 yards to give the Blue Raiders great field position at the Golden Panther 35.

The Blue Raider offense continued to struggle in the first half; however, when Craddock was intercepted by Anthony Gaitor inside the Golden Panther 15, who was run down by Malcolm Beyah at the Middle Tennessee 12 before he could reach paydirt. McCall ran it in from the 9 three plays later to give the Golden Panthers their first lead, 7-3, late in the opening half.

Middle Tennessee's defense, came up strong once again when it stopped FIU inside the 5 with time running out in the half. Facing a fourth-and-goal from the 3 kicker Dustin Rivest came on to boot a 17-yard field goal to send the home team into the half with a 10-3 lead.

Things did not improve too much at the start of the second half. Craddock was intercepted by Gaitor on the opening drive of the quarter. Gaitor returned the interception 27 yards for a touchdown and Rivest's extra point was good to give the Golden Panthers a 17-3 lead with 14:10 remaining.

Sophomore Dwight Dasher replaced Craddock on the following Blue Raider drive and marched the team 48 yards on 14 plays before the drive stalled at the Golden Panther 20. Gendreau came on to nail his second field goal of the game, a 37-yarder, to best his previous career best from earlier in the game and pull Middle Tennessee to within 17-6 with 8:19 remaining.

Middle Tennessee's defense had kept the Blue Raiders in the game but the unit was unable to get a critical stop following Gendreau's second field goal and FIU extended its lead as a result. The Golden Panthers marched 76 yards on nine plays and A'Mon Ned finished the drive off with a 1-yard run to give his team a commanding 24-6 lead with 3:29 remaining in the third quarter.

The Blue Raiders wouldn't go down without a fight and Dasher ignited a second-straight scoring drive, this time getting the Blue Raiders into the end zone, when Phillip Tanner scored from the 3 with 49 seconds remaining in the half. The key play on the eight-play, 63-yard drive was Dasher's 28-yard completion to Wes Caldwell. Middle Tennessee went for 2 and Dasher found Beyah in the back of the end zone but the play was negated due to an ineligible receiver downfield and Gendreau came on to kick the extra point to cut the deficit to 24-13.

Middle Tennessee's defense came up with a big stop on FIU's first drive of the fourth quarter but the Blue Raiders gave the ball right back when Dasher was intercepted by Marshall McDuffie on a deep ball intended for Eldred King.

Three plays later McCall dialed T.Y. Hilton's number. Hilton beat the defense for a 63-yard

touchdown reception to increase the FIU lead to 31-13 and essentially thwart any Blue Raider comeback hopes with 10:02 remaining.

Tanner added his second touchdown in the fourth quarter and Dasher rushed in for the 2-point conversion to close the gap to 31-21 but the second-half offensive flurry proved too little, too late.

GAME NOTES

DASHER ADDS SPARK: Sophomore Dwight Dasher, who led Middle Tennessee to a 47-6 win over FIU last year, came on in relief of Joe Craddock in the third quarter and gave the Blue Raider offense a spark. Dasher led the Blue Raiders to scores on his first two drives and in three of the six drives he engineered. The sophomore finished with 78 rushing yards while completing 7 of 15 passes for 47 yards.

GENDREAU SOLID: True freshman placekicker Alan Gendreau has had an inconsistent season but all he needed was to return to his home state. Gendreau made a career-best two field goals, including a career long 37 yarder in the third quarter. Gendreau had missed his previous two attempts before making the two against FIU.

PICK FOR SUBER: Junior Alex Suber came up with his team-leading second interception in the second quarter against FIU to thwart an FIU scoring drive. Suber intercepted the ball inside the 10-yard line and returned it 60 yards. Suber now has three interceptions for his career.

GROUND GAME SHOWS IMPROVEMENT: Behind strong running from Phillip Tanner and the play of Dwight Dasher, Middle Tennessee rushed for a season-high 171 yards. Tanner led the way with 79 yards while Dasher added a season-best 78 yards. Tanner scored both of Middle Tennessee's touchdowns with rushing scores.

QUICK HITTERS: DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-best 31st straight start ... PK Alan Gendreau connected on the longest field goal of his career when he nailed a 36 yarder in the first quarter then bettered that mark with a 37-yarder in the third quarter ... Walk-on Norman Washington recorded his first career fumble at the end of the first quarter ... MT scored for just the second time this season on its opening drive (the other time was against Maryland) ... QB Dwight Dasher's 28-yard pass to Wes Caldwell was the longest of the season ... Wes Caldwell's 28-yard reception was the longest of his career ... Punter David DeFatta saw his streak of placing a punt inside the 20-yard line end at 17 games ... MT fell to 0-2 all-time at FIU ... The home team in the series has now won all four games ... MT fell to 6-4 in conference road games under Rick Stockstill.

Printed on March 10, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/34591