# Strong road showing at Mississippi State falls short

## Blue Raiders lose second-half lead, fall 31-22

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**STARKVILLE, Miss .** - Middle Tennessee's offense put together five scoring drives and Eldred King turned in one of the best performances ever by a Blue Raider receiver but it wasn't enough in a tough 31-22 setback to Mississippi State at Davis Wade Stadium.

The Blue Raiders stood toe-to-toe with the Bulldogs in the first half and trailed 14-13 at the break before taking their first lead on the opening drive of the second half. Mississippi State was too strong on two pivotal second half drives as Middle Tennessee's strong road showing wasn't enough to warrant an upset.

King was outstanding with a career-best night. His 11 receptions were one shy of the school record and tied for third most all-time and his 164 yards are 11th most in a single game. The junior pass catcher also reeled in a touchdown. Quarterback Joe Craddock was 23-of-40 for 235 yards and a touchdown. Phillip Tanner also added a touchdown. Freshman kicker Alan Gendreau continued his strong work with three field goals to run his streak of consecutive makes to six over a three-game stretch.

The Blue Raiders finished with 348 yards total offense, including 268 through the air, and had one of their more productive outputs of late.

The spirited showing had the Blue Raiders in position to make a run.

Gendreau's third field goal of the game and sixth straight over a three-game span gave the Blue Raiders their first lead - 16-14 - when he nailed a 23-yarder to cap an impressive 14-play, 66-yard effort on the first series of the second half. Craddock was 5-of-9 for 43 yards on the drive and connected with Patrick Honeycutt for a crucial 18-yard gain on third-and-3 from the Blue Raider 49.

Mississippi State (3-5) stopped a string of four consecutive stops by the Blue Raider defense when it answered the Blue Raiders' opening score of the second half with one of its own. The Bulldogs had allowed 16 unanswered points before quarterback Tyson Lee ran in from the 4 to cap a 12-play, 69-yard drive and provide his team a 21-16 advantage.

The Blue Raider offense went three-and-out and Mississippi State turned the field when David DeFatta's punt went 28 yards to give the Bulldogs possession at the Middle Tennessee 48. The Bulldogs moved 27 yards before the Blue Raider defense made a big third-down stand and forced an Adam Carlson 37-yard field goal to keep it a one-possession game at 24-16 late in the third quarter.

Mississippi State got what would prove to be the game's pivotal touchdown on its next possession when Anthony Dixon's third touchdown capped an 11-play, 61-yard drive that provided a 31-16 cushion with 9:45 remaining.

It was critical because Middle Tennessee (2-6) answered on its next drive when Phillip Tanner capped an impressive drive with a 1-yard plunge to close the gap to 31-22 but the 2-point conversion attempt failed and the Blue Raiders remained down two possessions. Although the 16-play, 76 yard drive was impressive the only drawback was the 7:01 it consumed with time running down in the fourth quarter.

The Blue Raider defense made one final stand but time ran out on Middle Tennessee's comeback bid.

Mississippi State jumped out to the early lead on the game's opening drive. The Bulldogs took the opening kickoff and methodically marched 80 yards on eight plays, capping the impressive opening drive with Dixon's 4-yard touchdown run 3:35 into the contest.

Gendreau continued his hot streak when he capped Middle Tennessee's opening possession with a 30-yard field goal to pull the Blue Raiders to within 7-3 with 8:03 remaining in the first quarter. It climaxed an impressive opening drive for the Blue Raiders, who drove 51 yards to the Bulldogs 13 before the drive stalled. Craddock was 4-of-5 for 25 yards on the first series. Mississippi State hurt itself with two penalties for 26 yards.

Mississippi State answered on its next drive when Dixon struck again, taking the handoff and bursting into the open field for a 62-yard touchdown three plays into the drive. The Bulldogs had racked up 144 yards on their first two possessions.

Middle Tennessee's defense stiffened and forced a punt on State's next possession and Dasher came aboard for his first series. Dasher engineered an impressive drive and led the offense 64 yards but it needed 65 for a touchdown. Chris McClover's one-handed grab of a Dasher pass on third-and-5 play turned into a 30-yard gain to highlight the drive. Tanner had a 20-yard run on the drive. Dasher made it to the 1 on a third-and-goal play from the 5 before Gendreau came on to cap the drive with a 19-yard boot - his fifth consecutive successful try over a three-game stretch.

The Blue Raider defense held State three straight series and the offense finally took advantage when Craddock and King connected twice on a scoring drive. Craddock hit King in stride for a 55-yard gain on the first play of the second quarter. Craddock threw his 21st career touchdown pass when he found King in the end zone on a huge third-and-8 play from the Bulldogs 14 to cap the quick scoring drive. It was King's first career touchdown and pulled the Blue Raiders to within 14-13 with 6:29 remaining in the half. King had two receptions for 69 yards on the drive and established a new career high of 94 yards before halftime, besting his previous best of 82 against Kentucky.

After its slow start Middle Tennessee's defense clamped down the rest of the first half to keep the Blue Raiders in the game and the offense was able to put together three scoring drives against the tough Mississippi State defense. Mississippi State scored on its first two possessions but the Blue Raider defense shut out the Bulldogs on their next four possessions of the half. The Blue Raiders strong defensive front held the Bulldogs to 17 rushing yards and 46 total yards in the second quarter, while the offense nearly doubled the hosts with 84 yards in the second quarter to get back into the game heading into the half. After yielding 150 yards total offense to Mississippi State on its first two possessions the Blue Raider defense rose to the occasion and limited the Bulldogs to 55 yards on their next four possessions of the first half combined.

Middle Tennessee has a bye week before returning to Floyd Stadium to face Louisiana-Monroe on Homecoming Nov. 8.

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE POSTGAME NOTES**

**CRADDOCK JUMPS INTO TOP TEN:** Senior Joe Craddock completed 23 passes against Mississippi State to run his career total to 269. That puts him ninth on the single-season list at Middle Tennessee.

**3,000 MAN:** With 235 passing yards against Mississippi State, senior quarterback Joe Craddock became just the 13th signal-caller in school history to reach the 3,000-yard mark. Craddock, the fourth QB in the FBS era to reach the 3,000-yard plateau, now has 3,090 career passing yards and stands just 133 yards behind Mickey Corwin (3,223) for 12th place all-time.

**CAREER NIGHT FOR KING:** Junior Eldred King seems to enjoy playing against the SEC. King, who had six catches for 82 yards earlier this year at Kentucky, turned in a career performance against Mississippi State. The Thomaston, Ga., native set career bests in receptions and yards with 11 catches for 164 yards to go along with a touchdown. He also turned in the eighth 100-yard receiving effort under Rick Stockstill and the fourth this season.

**MORE ON KING:** Eldred King turned in one of the best performances by a receiver in program history against Mississippi State with a career night. King's 11 receptions tied for third most in a single game and his 164 yards were one off the top 10 list. King's 11 receptions were one off the school record of 12 held by Kendall Newsom and Tyrone Calico. King reeled in a 55-yard reception that keyed a first-half scoring drive. It was the third-longest offensive play from scrimmage for a Blue Raider this season. King has two of the top three offensive plays from scrimmage.

**GENDREAU SETS CAREER-HIGH:** Alan Gendreau, who struggled early this season by making just two of his first five field goals, nailed three against Mississippi State to extend his consecutive made

streak to six. Gendreau also scored a career-best 10 points to better his previous high of seven set against FIU.

**QUICK HITTERS:** DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-best 33rd straight start ... Byron McLeod made his first career start tonight against MSU at tight end ... Freshman Alan Gendreau's 30-yard field goal in the first quarter was his career-best fourth in a row and he later extended it to five straight with an 18 yarder in the second quarter ... Phillip Tanner's 20-yard run in the first quarter went down as the longest run from scrimmage for the Blue Raiders this season ... DT Gary Tucker's TFL in the first quarter was just the second of his career ... Joe Craddock's second quarter touchdown was the 21st of his career and stands just one back of Bob Hallum for ninth place all-time ... Tonight's game was nationally televised by ESPNU which is the ninth nationally televised broadcast for the Blue Raiders all-time and the seventh under Head Coach Rick Stockstill ... Middle Tennessee's three points to begin the second half was its first points on the opening drive of the second half this season ... Phillip Tanner's fourth quarter TD was the seventh rushing TD of the season and the 10th of his career.

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