Tanner, Blue Raiders 'run' past North Texas, 52-13

Football wins third straight as junior tailback shatters SBC, school records

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's ground attack enjoyed the breakout game it has been seeking and junior tailback Phillip Tanner and a dominating offensive line was the major contributors as the Blue Raiders routed North Texas, 52-13, in the home finale at Floyd Stadium Saturday.

The Blue Raiders won their third straight to improve to 5-6 overall, 3-3, in the SBC, and kept alive their hopes of becoming bowl eligible when they travel to Louisiana-Lafayette to conclude the regular season, Dec. 3.

Tanner enjoyed one of the most productive games of any Blue Raider ever and he had the greatest offensive outburst in SBC history with six touchdowns - five rushing - and 159 yards on 14 carries. A Texas native, Tanner ran roughshod through the Mean Green defense, generally breaking tackles and running over defenders on his way to touchdowns of 12, 1, 19, 66, 36 and 92 yards. The first five touchdowns were rushing scores and Tanner capped the outlandish scoring day with a 92-yard

kickoff return to start the second half.

Tanner finished with 301 all-purpose yards, the third-highest total in program history.

With Tanner leading the attack, Middle Tennessee piled up a season-high 489 yards total offense, including 237 on the ground - also a season high. Senior quarterback Joe Craddock also enjoyed a strong outing in his final home game. Craddock completed 19-of-31 passes for 251 yards and a touchdown. He started the scoring with a 45-yard pass to Eldred King.

Tanner's six touchdowns and 36 points broke the Sun Belt single-game records for touchdowns and points, and his five rushing touchdowns were the second most in a single game by a Blue Raider.

While the offense put forth a spirited display of punishing running, the defense also was strong. The unit pitched a second-half shutout and forced three turnovers. North Texas managed just 364 total yards and was outscored 35-0 after closing to within 17-13 late in the first quarter. Kevin Brown led the defense with eight tackles, all solo, including one for loss. Ted Riley totaled seven take downs, all solo, including one for loss.

The tone was set from the beginning when Middle Tennessee's defense forced a three-and-out on North Texas' opening possession. The Blue Raiders needed just three plays to get on the scoreboard when Eldred King beat the corner and Craddock hit him in stride for a 45-yard strike. Alan Gendreau added the extra point to provide Middle Tennessee the early 7-0 advance with 13:17 remaining in the first quarter.

Jeremy Kellem stripped the ball from Bryant Seidle on the first play of North Texas' second possession and defensive back Rod Issac pounced on it to return possession to the Blue Raiders. Middle Tennessee's offense took advantage of the turnover, this time using a more methodical approach to hit paydirt that culminated with Gendreau's 28-yard field goal. Gendreau's kick capped a 10-play, 44-yard drive that provided a 10-0 lead and enabled the freshman kicker to tie the school record for consecutive makes at eight.

The Blue Raider defense came up big again on North Texas' third possession, forcing its second straight turnover when Dwight Smith forced a fumble that was recovered by Chris McCoy. Tanner capped the drive with a 12-yard touchdown run to extend the lead to 17-0 with 6:20 remaining - in the first quarter.

It may have looked easy at that point but North Texas (1-10, 0-6) would not cooperate. The Mean Green scored on consecutive drives to trim the lead to 17-13. Emmanuel Perez blocked the extra point on North Texas' second touchdown and it all went downhill for the Mean Green from there.

The second quarter - and the rest of the game - belonged to Middle Tennessee. Tanner scored four of his five touchdowns in the second quarter as the Blue Raiders piled up 28 unanswered points to pull away from North Texas. The 28 points were the most scored in a quarter under Head Coach Rick Stockstill and left little doubt as to the outcome as the Blue Raiders head into halftime with a 45-13 edge.

Three of Middle Tennessee's four second-quarter touchdown drives required just two plays before Tanner found paydirt. Although it was a quarter highlighted by offensive exploits, defense also wouldn't be denied. The Blue Raider defense held North Texas to three straight three-and-outs in the

second quarter after the Mean Green had closed to within 17-13. Even when North Texas had a chance to seize a bit of momentum before the break, Middle Tennessee's defense would not allow it.

The Mean Green faced first-and-goal at the 5 in the final 30 seconds of the half but the Blue Raiders put together a goal-line stand that climaxed with North Texas being stopped inside the 1.

Middle Tennessee maintained its momentum to start the second half when Tanner took the kickoff back 92 yards for his sixth touchdown to tie the Middle Tennessee single-game record for points (36) and touchdowns (6). It also staked the Blue Raiders to a 52-13 advantage as the team continued to keep alive its goal of becoming bowl eligible.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE POSTGAME QUOTES
HEAD COACH RICK STOCKSTILL
On the win:
"I thought we did some good things. I was disappointed at times because I thought we got a little sloppy at times. We had some great individual effort and great team effort. I can't be as happy as I would like to be right now because of the three turnovers, but I am happy for my players because they have worked hard all week. It's a great win for our guys especially against a North Texas team Middle Tennessee has never beat at home."

On Phillip Tanner:
"I thought Phillip Tanner made some great runs. He played really well and he made some tough, physical runs. When you are able to run the ball it does so much for your confidence on offense and defense. His runs today were very inspiring. They were tough runs that showed heart. He runs with great determination and passion and it was good to see him get in the end zone several times."

JR TAILBACK PHILLIP TANNER
On the record running performance:
"It was not an easy week for me. My first child was born Monday (a daughter) and she is still in the hospital and my fiancé has never missed a game and she couldn't be here today so it was tough. I needed to be in that locker room. I needed to be with my teammates and my family wanted that. It was a good day and it was a good day for all of us."

On the offensive line:
"They are a wonderful bunch of guys. We are up together and when we are down we are down together. Their goal every week is to get me big runs and I always tell them, 'just get me through the line of scrimmage.' They did that today and I'm really happy for those linemen because they have worked hard and improved all year. They were the big reason for what we did on the ground today."

SR QUARTERBACK JOE CRADDOCK
On Phillip Tanner's performance:
"It's incredible to see what P.T. did tonight. He was running hard and breaking tackles. He did some great things and it has been a tough week for P.T. so knowing that and watching what he did makes it even more impressive. He's a great teammate."

On the first TD to Eldred King:
"It was really a busted play and Eldred got open and we were able to hook up. That was a big play to get things started offensively today."

On the offensive line:
"I wish I was a junior and had another year with those guys. They are going to be great next year. Someone is going to be lucky to get to play behind them."

MIDDLE TENNESSEE POSTGAME NOTES

BLUE RAIDERS MOVE AHEAD OF MEAN GREEN: Middle Tennessee and North Texas entered play today tied for the most league wins in Sun Belt Conference history with 30. The Blue Raiders broke the tie with the victory over the Mean Green today to move their count to 31. The league held its first season in 2001.

OFFENSE HAS BIG DAY: The Middle Tennessee offense enjoyed a breakout day in the win over North Texas. The unit accounted for season highs in points with 52 and in total offense with 489 yards. The 52 points are the most scored by a Rick Stockstill coached team and the total yards ranks fourth. The top five single-game total yardage marks are: 555 vs Louisville in 2007, 499 vs ULM in 2007, 490 vs Memphis in 2007, 489 vs. North Texas in 2008 and 449 vs ULM in 2006). The Blue Raiders also rushed for 237 yards which is the most since they gained 260 on the ground in a win over Memphis last year.

GENDREAU TIES MARK: Freshman Alan Gendreau's 28-yard field goal in the first quarter was his eighth straight made three-pointer which ties the school record set by Kelly Potter in 1984. Gendreau is now 10-for-13 on the season and his 10 makes are the most by a freshman since Brian Kelly hit 11 in 2000.

TANNER HAS HUGE DAY: Junior Phillip Tanner had a game to remember against North Texas. The Dallas, Texas product rushed for a career-high 159 yards and five touchdowns while adding a 92-yard kickoff return for a score. The five rushing scores is the second most in a single game by a Blue Raider and Tanner became the first player to top the 100-yard rushing mark since Dwight Dasher had 180 yards in a 2007 win at Memphis. His 36 points against the Mean Green tied the single-game scoring record.

TANNER SETS SBC RECORDS: Phillip Tanner's six touchdowns against North Texas set new Sun Belt Conference records for touchdowns scored and points in a single-game. Tanner broke the record of 30 points and five touchdowns previously set by Jason Cherry of ULL earlier this season against North Texas and also the Mean Green's Casey Fitzgerald who accomplished the feat against Navy in 2007.

PEREZ GETS BLOCK: Sophomore Emmanuel Perez came up with his first blocked kick when he rejected an extra point in the first quarter against North Texas. It was the first blocked PAT by the Blue Raiders since Roy Polite collected one against Troy in 2004. The block by Perez was the third overall block of the season which is the most under Rick Stockstill. Since joining the FBS ranks in 1999, Middle Tennessee has now come up with 26 total blocked kicks (9 punts, 9 field goals, 8 PATs).

NEW FLOYD STADIUM ATTENDANCE RECORD: Middle Tennessee drew 101,135 fans to Floyd Stadium in 2008 for an average of 20,227, which goes down as a new single-season attendance record. The 2008 Blue Raiders topped the previous mark of 19,347 (77,388) set in four games during the 2006 season. The fifth game that year was played in Nashville against Louisville.

CRADDOCK MOVES TO SEVENTH: With 251 yards passing against North Texas, senior Joe

Craddock moved past Phil Ironside and Billy Walker for seventh place on the all-time passing yardage list and topped the 200-yard mark in a game for the 11th time and ninth time this season. Craddock, who has done virtually all of his work in two years, now has 3,769 career passing yards.

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee has led from start to finish in three straight games ... Middle Tennessee's 52 points scored today are the most ever under Rick Stockstill and the most by the Blue Raiders since they had 70 against Idaho in 2001... The 28 points scored today in the second quarter is the most in a quarter under Rick Stockstill ... Middle Tennessee went over the 50-point mark for the 10th time as a FBS member ... WR Eldred King recorded his third touchdown catch of the season when he hauled in a 45 yarder in the first quarter ... With a forced fumble against North Texas, Jeremy Kellem has now been responsible for 15 turnovers in 23 career games played ... DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-best 36th straight start ... WR Caleb Dugger made his first collegiate catch against UNT.

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