

Strong late-season run comes to close

Blue Raiders fall 42-28 in season finale at Louisiana-Lafayette

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LAFAYETTE, La. - Middle Tennessee's strong second half run finally was derailed when Louisiana-Lafayette fought off the Blue Raiders, 42-28, at Cajuns Field Wednesday to end their three-game win streak.

The game featured two teams seeking to gain bowl eligibility and it was indicative from the outset and the teams battled back and forth in an effort to keep their season alive. Middle Tennessee (5-7, 3-4) had pulled to within one game of becoming bowl eligible with an impressive three-game win streak that preceded the setback to Louisiana-Lafayette (6-6, 5-2).

Senior quarterback Joe Craddock was outstanding in his final game as a Blue Raider. Craddock completed 22-of-28 passes for 242 yards and two touchdowns. He became the only quarterback in school history to have 10 games with more than 200 yards passing in a single season. Craddock also tied for fifth on the single-season touchdown list with 14.

Phillip Tanner also was dynamic as he continued his late-season surge with 82 yards on 24 carries and two touchdowns. Tanner tied for third on the single-season rushing touchdown list with 10. His two touchdowns gave him 12 points in the game and 102 for the season, making him one of three players in program history to score more than 100 points in a season.



Middle Tennessee's offense piled up 409 yards and had no problems moving the ball; however, the unit was victimized by three uncharacteristic and costly turnovers late in the second half.

Linebackers Danny Carmichael and Lonnie Clemmons led Middle Tennessee's defense with 8.5 tackles each. Carmichael had three tackles for loss.

The game was highly-contested from the outset and the second half played out as though the first team to make a mistake would be the one to lose.

Trailing 21-14 at the half, Middle Tennessee flexed its muscle on the opening drive of the second half, putting together a masterpiece of a drive that covered 82 yards on 13 plays and consumed 6:21. Craddock hooked up with King for a 22-yard touchdown pass to cap the drive and tie the game at 21-21 with 8:42 remaining in the third quarter. Middle Tennessee demonstrated tremendous balance on the drive with eight rushing plays and five passing attempts. The big play was Desmond Gee's 15-yard catch and run on a third-and-15 play from the Blue Raider 13. Gee also had a six-yard run on third-and-5 from the Cajun 32 to keep the chains moving.

The Cajuns regained the lead on the next drive when Desormeaux found Ladarius Green for a 5-yard touchdown pass to go on top 28-21 with 5:23 remaining but the Blue Raiders seemed to have found an offensive rhythm and continued their assault on the second offensive possession of the second half.

Craddock and freshman receiver Sancho McDonald came up huge on a third-and-goal call from the 15. McDonald made a sensational grab in the back corner with very little margin for error as he just got one foot inbounds. The stellar catch tied the game 28-28 following Alan Gendreau's extra point with 14:53 remaining.

At this point you could sense a shootout brewing in Cajun Country and Louisiana-Lafayette did not disappoint. The Cajuns matched Middle Tennessee by scoring on its second possession of the second half, picking up yards in chunks, during an 80-yard drive capped by Desormeaux's 18-yard touchdown pass to Jason Cherry to stake Louisiana-Lafayette to a 35-28 lead with 11:09 remaining.

Middle Tennessee made the game's first mistake when it lost a fumble on the next possession and the Cajuns made it hurt with a little razzle dazzle when Desormeaux lined up at receiver, took the handoff, and threw a 37-yard touchdown pass to Louis Lee to give Louisiana-Lafayette a 42-28 lead with 6:23 remaining.

Any glitter of hope that remained for Middle Tennessee diminished when Craddock's pass was intercepted on the Blue Raiders' next possession to give the Cajuns possession near midfield with time ticking away. The defense did come up big to keep the chances alive and returned possession to the offense with a three-and-out.

The combination of Craddock to McDonald moved the ball inside the 5 with just under two minutes remaining but a snap over Craddock's head was recovered by Louisiana-Lafayette to essentially seal the win.

The track meet materialized from the opening kickoff.

After Louisiana-Lafayette went on top 7-0 on its opening drive, Middle Tennessee came right back on the strength of its ground game. The Blue Raiders capped an eight play, 76-yard drive with

Tanner's 2-yard run. Tanner piled up 49 of the team's 76 yards on the ground during the establishing drive to even the score 7-7.

The Ragin' Cajuns followed suit with their running game to vault to a 21-7 lead early in the second quarter. A partially blocked punt helped set up the Cajuns second score when they took over at the Blue Raider 47. It took eight plays before Fenroy plowed in from the 4 to even the score 7-7 with 2:16 remaining in the first quarter. After Louisiana-Lafayette forced a punt, its offense once again picked up yards in chunks and extended its lead to 21-7 when Fenroy scored from the 3 with 11:20 remaining in the opening half.

The fast-paced start didn't stop there as Middle Tennessee narrowed the gap on its next drive. Although the drive was capped by Tanner's second touchdown of the half - a 4-yard burst to hit paydirt - it was the combination of Craddock to King that did the most damage during the 11-play, 80-yard scoring drive that chewed 5:02 off the clock. Craddock accounted for 72 of the team's 80 yards on the drive. He was 6-of-6 for 54 yards on the drive and he rushed for 18 more. King grabbed four of the receptions for 47 yards, including a spectacular 23-yard reception on third-and-5 from the Ragin' Cajuns' 45 to keep the drive alive.

The Blue Raiders just missed a chance to put more points on the board just before the half when Gendreau's 46-yard field goal attempt into the wind fell one yard short. It ended a streak of eight consecutive makes, which ties the school record.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE POSTGAME NOTES

STRONG NIGHT FOR JOE: Senior Joe Craddock turned in his 10th 200-yard passing game of the season with 242 yards against Louisiana. The 10 200-yard outings is a Middle Tennessee single-season record. Craddock also added two touchdown passes to give him 15 on the season which ties for the fifth most in school history.

TWO OVER 50: Middle Tennessee finished the regular season with two receivers over the 50-catch mark for the first time since 2004. Patrick Honeycutt had 51 catches and Eldred King added 51. The last two to top the 50 mark was Kerry Wright and Chris Henry in 2004 with Wright reeling in 76 and Henry adding 60 receptions.

TANNER TOPS 100: With two touchdowns against Louisiana, Phillip Tanner went over the 100 point mark in single-season scoring to become just the third player in school history to reach triple digits. Tanner joins Dwone Hicks, who did it twice, and Kippy Bayless as the only ones to top the 100-point mark in a single-season. Tanner ended the regular season with 102 points to rank fourth on the single-season list.

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee scored a touchdown on its opening drive for the second game in a row and the fourth time this season ... The 21 first half points allowed by MT was the most this season in the first half of play ... Alan Gendreau's consecutive made field goal streak ended at eight when he missed a 46 yarder into the wind just before the half ... DT Trevor Jenkins made his team-leading 37th straight start tonight against ULL ... WR Eldred King's third quarter TD reception was his fourth of the season ... Dating back to the North Texas game, Phillip Tanner scored eight straight touchdowns for the Blue Raiders before Eldred King broke the streak with his TD reception in the third quarter ... TE Byron McLeod made his second career reception tonight ... Middle Tennessee lost its regular season finale for the fifth straight year.

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