

March 16, 2009

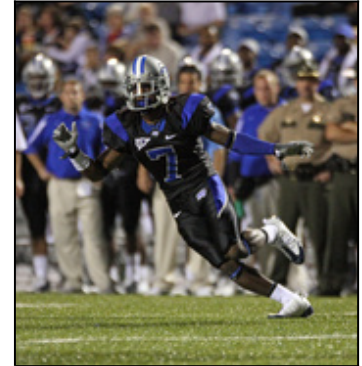
## Spring football practice opens today

### Blue Raiders welcome back 45 lettermen and 17 starters

*Athletic Communications*

**WHAT WILL BE THE EMPHASIS ON THE OFFENSIVE SIDE OF THE BALL THIS SPRING?** The main emphasis, especially early, is understanding and learning the offense. Not so much that it is a drastic change in what we have done in the past but in the terminology and some of the techniques. There will be a learning curve in the beginning. I hope we can increase our tempo. I thought last year, at times, our tempo was pretty good but I think we can take it to another level. I think we can play faster and I look forward to seeing how some of these young guys have improved after being here a full year. Our offensive line has had a great offseason and a lot of guys have gotten faster and stronger and now I just want to see how that translates on the field.

**WHAT WILL BE THE EMPHASIS ON THE DEFENSIVE SIDE OF THE BALL THIS SPRING?** I think the biggest concern is our linebacker position because we have to replace two starters who were very productive last year. We feel great about [Danny Carmichael](#) in the middle but we have guys replacing Ivon (Hickmon) and Lonnie (Clemons) who have not played a lot. We addressed that need in recruiting but those guys will not be here until this summer. We have to find out who will step up this spring and if they can not handle it then we have to give those freshmen a good look immediately. Up front, we have guys who have been here awhile that need to step up and answer the bell. Who will take Trevor's (Jenkins) place and who will take over for Wes (Hofacker). I like what we have coming back but it is a matter now if they will be able to do it and we should have a better handle on that after the spring.



Alex Suber and the Blue Raiders will hit the field today for the start of spring practice. ()

**TALK ABOUT YOUR TWO NEW COACHING STAFF ADDITIONS IN TONY FRANKLIN AND STEVE ELLIS.** I am excited about both guys and what they add to our program. As for Tony, he brings an offense that is really not very different in terms of philosophy in what we were doing before so that is good for our players and coaches. He is very organized and has sound reasoning for what we are going to do. The current players fit in nicely to what he will do with the offense. Tony is very passionate about coaching and very good fundamentally. There is no doubt our quarterbacks will improve fundamentally under Tony and the offense will improve as well because of his attention to detail.

With Steve, I am very excited about him and his style of coaching. He is a throwback, old-school coach who is very enthusiastic and passionate about coaching. He has done a great job of fitting in with our staff and the players he coaches. He is a very tough, hard-nosed, disciplinarian who will bring a lot to the defensive side of the ball.

**AFTER THREE SPRING PRACTICE SEASONS OF NOT KNOWING IF YOU WOULD HAVE ENOUGH PLAYERS TO PRACTICE ON A GIVEN DAY, IT HAS TO BE REFRESHING TO HAVE A COMPLETE SQUAD IN 2009.** It means you have been doing things the right way and you are bringing in quality people who have a goal of graduating and want to be successful on the football field. This spring we will have more people out there than ever before which is very encouraging. We will still miss three offensive linemen because of injuries but if you had those guys then you could basically do whatever you wanted to do in practice. We are still a little short at linebacker and offensive line but it is a testament to this staff and program as to how far we have come. It is almost like we are now a full-fledged Division I team. It has taken us a long time to get here but now it is very gratifying.

**YOU ARE DEVELOPING DEPTH ON THE OFFENSIVE LINE AND RETURN ALL FIVE STARTERS. TALK ABOUT THIS UNIT AND SOME OF THE KEY ISSUES TO WORK ON THIS SPRING.** I told them the first day they got back in January that the best teams in the country have great leadership from the offensive line and that the line was the corps of the football team. Most teams go as the offensive line goes. I challenged them to become the closest group on the team and that no one outworks them or is a better leader. They need to do everything together. The offensive line sets the tone every day and they need to have toughness. I think it is a good group but they are not close to being as good as they can be. They have been challenged and have until next September to establish themselves. When the season is over we will know how well they played because it will reflect in our record.

**YOU HAVE YOUR TOP EIGHT RECEIVERS BACK FROM A PRODUCTIVE 2008 SEASON. WHAT HAS IMPRESSED YOU THE MOST ABOUT THIS GROUP?** I think the big thing is their versatility and unselfishness. It is a strong unit and Coach (Justin) Watts has done a great job with these guys. They all get along and no one cares about how many balls they catch. They practice hard, play hard, and do whatever it takes to allow the team to win. Some of the guys are limited in some areas but guys like Malcolm (Beyah), Eldred (King), and Patrick (Honeycutt) can play multiple positions. Those three can run deep routes, short routes, screens, reverses, that sort of thing. Then you have [Marcus Thurmond](#) in the mix who will add a spark to the group as well.

**DWIGHT DASHER IS PENCILED IN AS THE STARTER AT QUARTERBACK BUT YOU ARE PRETTY IMPRESSED WITH BRENT BURNETTE AS WELL. EVALUATE YOUR QUARTERBACK POSITION.** I am excited about Dwight. He had an excellent

freshman year and then last year was a learning experience as he was faced with adversity on an athletic field for the first time in his life. I think he learned some valuable lessons last year and he has come back and worked very hard in the offseason and is doing a good job of providing leadership. With the coaching he will get from Tony (Franklin) his fundamentals will improve and I believe he will be a much better quarterback than his first year. I look forward to seeing his development.

As for Brent, he showed flashes last year. He can be a very productive quarterback for us. It is really unfair to evaluate him right now because he has only worked with the scout team but I like his toughness, smarts, and his footwork. He needs to work on his fundamentals like any freshman but I look forward to watching him compete this spring.

**TO THE CASUAL FAN, WHAT WILL BE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE IN THE BLUE RAIDER OFFENSE FROM LAST YEAR TO THIS YEAR?** Hopefully, we will be able to do more because of the experience we have returning. We were so limited early in the year last season because we played so many true and redshirt freshmen, especially on the offensive line. Then at receiver you had a number of guys who had only been on campus for three or four weeks before their first game. We will be more experienced so we will be able to put more on their plate and do a few more things than we did a year ago. We should be more versatile and I think we will have a change in our tempo and pace because we have played in a no-huddle type offense for a full year. It is definitely time to take a step up.

**YOUR BIGGEST AREA OF CONCERN ON DEFENSE IS AT LINEBACKER WHERE YOU LOST TWO STARTERS. TALK ABOUT THAT POSITION.** We feel good about [Danny Carmichael](#) in the middle. He brings toughness and experience to the unit as well as the entire defense. I think Danny is a guy on defense who sets the mindset in terms of how we will practice and play because of his intensity. We will obviously rely heavily on Danny this season. There is no one with any real experience at the other two positions. [Gorby Loreus](#) and [Darin Davis](#) really only played on special teams last year with limited snaps at linebacker. [Cam Robinson](#) and [Antwan Davis](#) have been here awhile and really need to step up in a big way or they will be passed. We have to find two guys out of Gorby, Darin, Antwan, and [Antonio Hill](#) or one of the freshmen will come in here and jump past them in the lineup.

**PHILLIP TANNER APPEARED TO GET BETTER AS THE 2008 SEASON ENDED. WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR TANNER IN 2009?** Phillip is an excellent running back with great strength, power, great speed at the second level, and catches the ball well. Where he needs to improve the most is in pass protection and when he does not have the ball in his hands which means running his routes and carrying out great fakes. I expect him to have a great senior year because he has enjoyed his best offseason since he arrived. I think he has improved his strength, he looks quicker, more physical, and tougher. I only expect great things from Phillip this year.

**ONE OF YOUR MOST EXCITING PLAYERS HAS BEEN SENIOR DESMOND GEE. HE IS MAKING THE MOVE BACK TO RECEIVER THIS SPRING. IS THIS TO UTILIZE HIS OVERALL PLAYMAKING ABILITY?** Desmond was really good his first two years here but last year he was a little up-and-down because of some family issues and not being totally healthy (knee). We will look at him at receiver and running back because he is such an exciting player with the ball in his hand. We have to find as many as possible to get him involved because he can make things happen. I am a huge fan of [Desmond Gee](#) because of the way he works and competes. He is such a team guy.

**YOUR KICKING GAME WAS PRETTY SOLID IN 2008 AND YOU RETURN JUST ABOUT EVERYONE IN 2009. HOW DO YOU SEE THE KICKING GAME ENTERING SPRING DRILLS?** In the spring we will spend some time early on field goals and extra points then at the halfway point we will work on the punt team. Overall, I feel good about our kickers but we do have to find a kickoff guy whether it is Alan (Gendreau) or David (DeFatta). We will not spend time on kickoff coverage, return or punt block.

**WHAT DO YOU AS A HEAD COACH EXPECT TO ACCOMPLISH THIS SPRING?** The big thing is to find out who our best 11 players are on both sides of the ball coming out of spring. We also want to come out with a great sense of who our leaders will be and who we can count on to lead this team in the summer because right now we don't know who they are. You have to have guys who will make it a priority to lead the team during summer workouts because we can not be with them. We also want to develop toughness and dependability as we approach the start of the season.

#### **SPRING PRACTICE DATES**

March 16, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30

April 2, 8, 10, 13, 16, **18** (Spring Game)

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