

September 4, 2009

Blue Raiders open 2009 season Saturday at Clemson

Kickoff scheduled for 5 PM CST on ESPN360

Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - None of the current Middle Tennessee players or coaches participated the last time the Blue Raiders traveled to Clemson to play the Tigers in 2003. But that doesn't mean there isn't some familiarity involved in Saturday's season opener for both teams. The game kicks off at 5 PM CST and can be seen on ESPN360.

Blue Raider Head Coach Rick Stockstill and several of his staff either played and/or coached at Clemson. Stockstill was a Clemson assistant coach from 1989 through 2002, with duties that included coordinating the offense as well as recruiting.

Middle Tennessee defensive line and associated head coach Les Herrin and safeties coach David Bibee are former Clemson assistants. Both Willie Simmons and Justin Watts played at Clemson, and then served as graduate assistants on the staff. So the Blue Raider staff has a great appreciation for the tradition of Clemson football.

Middle Tennessee will challenge that tradition with a more up-tempo spread offense against the Tigers this time, but it will be under the direction of new offensive coordinator Tony Franklin. Clemson fans may recall that Franklin's last effort against the Tigers was with Auburn in the 2007 Chick-Fil-A Bowl.

Franklin's offense is not new to Middle Tennessee, which has been using a similar version for years. "The transition here has been much easier than at Auburn or Troy because the personnel to run it were already in place," noted Franklin. "We have some very good receivers here, and we'll keep them fresh, using 10-12 in our rotation each game."



Rick Stockstill and the Blue Raiders will get the season started Saturday at ACC foe Clemson. ()

Junior QB [Dwight Dasher](#) will run the offense. Dasher started seven games (six at quarterback) as a true freshman in 2007 when injuries thrust him into the spotlight. In a 21-7 win at Memphis, Dasher had 410 yards of total offense, including 180 on the ground. The next week, he accounted for five TD's and led the team to 47 first half points against Florida International. After playing behind senior Joe Craddock last year, Dasher has emerged as a confident team leader for 2009. Red-shirt freshman [Brent Burnette](#) will back him up.

Dasher will be throwing to a bevy of veteran wide receivers, including seniors [Patrick Honeycutt](#), [Desmond Gee](#), and Chris McGlover. Other top targets include sophomores [Sancho McDonald](#) and [Malcolm Beyah](#), junior college star [Garrett Andrews](#), and walk-on [Shane Blissard](#).

Senior [Phillip Tanner](#) heads up the rushing attack after producing his best year as a Blue Raider in 2008. The Dallas, Tex., native accounted for 17 touchdowns a year ago and earned National Offensive Player of the Week honors after recording six touchdowns in a win over North Texas.

Despite having everybody back from last season, the Blue Raider offensive line is still young, with only one senior, center [Mark Thompson](#). Freshmen and sophomores started 48 games last season on the offensive line.

Defensively, the Blue Raiders will be using an attacking defense with a lot of blitzes and stunts. Coordinator Manny Diaz says, "We want to be the team that nobody wants to play."

No. 1 attacker will be senior linebacker [Danny Carmichael](#), who has started in the middle since his freshman year and is trying to become the first player to record more than 200 career tackles since 2000. He will be flanked by senior [Cam Robinson](#) and junior [Antwan Davis](#), while a host of talented freshmen push for playing time.

Up front, the Raider starters played in all 12 games last year, with 22 starts and 24 tackles for loss. [Brandon Perry](#) and [Jamari Lattimore](#) are the headliners.

The defensive unit with the most experience is the secondary, with seven of the top eight defenders returning. Senior [Alex Suber](#) and juniors [Rod Issac](#) and [Jeremy Kellem](#) had 29 starts between them last year, and the hard-hitting [Kevin Brown](#) started the last 10 games of 2008 at free safety.

Punter [David DeFatta](#) and place kicker [Alan Gendreau](#) both handled the same duties last year. DeFatta has a career punting average of over 40 yards and Gendreau hit 10 of 14 field goals as a true freshman.

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