

September 5, 2009

Early deficit drops Blue Raiders to season-opening loss

Middle Tennessee opens 95th campaign at Clemson

Athletic Communications

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CLEMSON, S.C. - Middle Tennessee fell behind early and could not recover in dropping its season opener, 37-14, to host Clemson as the 95th season of Blue Raider football kicked off Saturday evening in front a crowd of 75,000 at Memorial Stadium in Clemson, S.C. The final score was the same as the only other meeting in the series, Sept. 13, 2003.

The Tigers began the scoring shortly after the starting gun when C.J. Spiller took the opening kickoff and returned it 96 yards for a touchdown at 14:46. The extra point was converted, giving Clemson the 7-0 lead.

Middle Tennessee began its first possession at the 19-yard line. On the first play from scrimmage, [Dwight Dasher](#) completed a 28-yard pass to [Phillip Tanner](#). Another completion to [Shane Blissard](#) moved the Blue Raiders into Clemson territory before Dasher's third attempt was intercepted by DeAndre McDaniel at the Tiger 42. MT's defense held firm, however, forcing a punt.

The two teams then traded turns having the ball. Clemson's Richard Jackson lined up for a 45-yard field goal, but the kick was missed, giving Middle Tennessee (0-1) the ball back with 9:25 left in the first quarter. Dasher's first pass was tipped and picked off by Brandon Maye, returning the ball to the Tigers. Clemson drove to the Blue Raider five but was halted there before Jackson's 22-yard field goal pushed the lead to 10-0 with 5:16 remaining in the opening 15 minutes.

Middle Tennessee punted to start the second quarter, which resulted in a net of two yards due to a 50-yard return by Spiller to the Blue Raider 32. On the Tigers' second play, Blue Raider defensive end [Chris McCoy](#) scooped up a loose ball in the backfield and returned it 68 yards at 14:07 for a score to bring Middle Tennessee within three, 10-7, after [Alan Gendreau](#)'s extra point.

Clemson (1-0) marched down the field but again was stopped by the Blue Raider defense. Jackson connected on his second field goal of the afternoon, a 19-yarder, following a goal-line stand by MT to keep the Tigers out of the end zone for a 13-7 edge at the 8:16 mark.

Clemson then forced the Blue Raiders to punt. Jacoby Ford hauled in the return and went 61 yards down the home sideline for a Tiger touchdown at 6:02, increasing the lead to 20-7. Ford would tally Clemson's next score on a 43-yard reception from Kyle Parker, taking only nine seconds off the clock, for a 27-7 lead with 2:55 to play in the half.

The Tigers tacked on a 44-yard field goal by Jackson with 1:15 remaining in the second quarter, as the margin swelled to 30-7 at the intermission.

Middle Tennessee's third play from scrimmage in the second half was a 43-yard strike from Dasher to Blissard as the Blue Raiders crossed into Clemson territory setting up a MT score. Middle Tennessee returned to the scoring column at 12:29 of the third quarter when Dasher hit [Chris McClover](#) for an 18-yard strike capping a seven-play, 85-yard drive and covering 2:25 in time of possession. The touchdown is the first of McClover's career.

[Marcus Udell](#) wrestled the ball away from the Tigers' Jamie Harper at the Blue Raider 43 for his first career interception just three plays later. As Middle Tennessee moved down the field, Dasher threw his third pick of the game, landing in the hands of Chris Chancellor with just over 10 minutes to go in the third quarter.

Clemson quickly converted the turnover into another touchdown, as Parker connected with Marquan Jones on a 33-yard pass across the middle at 9:04 of the third quarter to finish off a three-play, 32-yard drive and the game's final score.

[Andrew Banks](#) moved in the quarterback position with 14:16 left for two plays. However, three plays later, Dasher returned and completed an 11-yard attempt to [Gene Delle Donne](#). The junior signal-caller led Middle Tennessee down the field to the Tiger five-yard line. On fourth down, Dasher's pass was out-of-bounds to [Garrett Andrews](#), turning the ball over on downs.



Desmond Gee had six kickoff returns for 117 yards and two catches for 12 yards as the Blue Raiders opened the 2009 season at Clemson Saturday. (Bradley Lambert)

Parker found Jones once again across the middle for a 38-yard completion, moving Clemson out of its own end and to midfield. The drive stalled four plays later after Jackson's 48-yard field goal was missed.

Andre Ellington ripped off a 36-yard rush around the right end on the Tigers' final possession. He remained the team's primary ball carrier as Clemson used the final 2:10 off the clock.

Dasher eclipsed the 200-yard barrier through the air for the third time in his career with 204 yards on 20-of-42. His 43-yard strike to Blissard was the longest for the Blue Raiders in the game.

Dasher also finished as the team leader with 61 yards on the ground. Middle Tennessee could not get much of a ground attack going, finishing with 92 yards on 37 carries for a 2.5-yard average. Blissard was the MT leader with 68 yards receiving in his first game as a Blue Raider.

[Antwan Davis](#) and [Cam Robinson](#) paced the Middle Tennessee defense with seven tackles apiece. Robinson had two of the team's four tackles for loss, including its only sack.

Parker ended the day 9-of-20 for the Tigers with 159 yards through the air. Ford had a team-high three catches, but Jones led the squad with 71 yards on the air. Harper edged Ellington as the Clemson leader with 75 yards on the ground, three more yards as his teammate.

Three Tigers finished with double-digit tackles, including a game-high 13 from Maye. McDaniel added a dozen, while Rashard Hall contributed 10.

The Blue Raiders will play host to Memphis at 6 p.m. Central in their home opener next week, Sept. 12, at Floyd Stadium. Tickets are available for purchase by calling 1-888-YES-MTSU.

GAME NOTES

MCCOY RECORDS FIRST TD: Senior defensive end [Chris McCoy](#) picked a good time to come up with his first collegiate touchdown. Early in the second quarter against Clemson, McCoy picked up a fumble by QB Willy Korn and went 68 yards untouched to the end zone to make the score 10-7, Tigers. It was McCoy's fourth career fumble return and the first return for a touchdown by the Blue Raiders since [Rod Issac](#) went 42 yards on Oct. 20, 2007 against Arkansas State.

FIRST TIME STARTERS: Middle Tennessee had a total of six players make their first collegiate start in the 2009 season opener against Clemson. The first time starters were WR [Garrett Andrews](#), LB [Antwan Davis](#), WR [Sancho McDonald](#), DT [Brandon Perry](#), LB [Cam Robinson](#), and OG [Alex Stuart](#).

PLAYING IN FIRST COLLEGIATE GAME: The Blue Raiders had seven players see action in their first career game tonight against the Clemson Tigers. The first-time players were WR [Garrett Andrews](#), WR [Shane Blissard](#), DT [Kendall Dangerfield](#), S [Denzell Guerra](#), RB [Craig Heyward](#), WR [Tavarres Jefferson](#), and S [Juno Prudhomm](#).

BLISSARD SHINES IN DEBUT: Walk-on wide receiver [Shane Blissard](#) made his collegiate debut and turned in an impressive first effort. The former Oakland High School star caught a team-high tying four passes for a Blue Raider-best 68 yards and started the second half. On Middle Tennessee's scoring drive to open the second half, Blissard reeled in two key receptions including a 43-yarder.

IRONY ON RETURN: Clemson returned the game's opening kickoff for a touchdown and it was the first time MT has allowed a kickoff return for a score since Arkansas' Cedric Cobbs went 95 yards on Oct. 9, 1999. Cobbs' return, ironically, was also the first play of the game in Middle Tennessee's first year of I-A football. The 96-yard return by Spiller went down as the longest return against MT in the I-A (FBS) era.

MOST AGAINST BLUE RAIDERS: Clemson's 135 punt return yards on five returns goes down as the most against the Blue Raiders in school history. The previous high was seven returns for 122 yards by Murray State in 1995.

MCCLOVER MAKES FIRST TD: Senior receiver [Chris McClover](#) came up with his first career touchdown reception against Clemson. McClover came into the game with 14 career receptions that he set as a junior. The Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., products score came on an 18-yard pass from [Dwight Dasher](#).

HITTING 200: [Dwight Dasher](#) finished with 204 yards through the air for his third-career 200-yard passing game. He completed 20-of-42 including a long of 43 yards to Blissard.

QUICK HITTEES: Center [Mark Thompson](#) made his team-leading 25th straight start ... LB [Cam Robinson](#) recorded his first career full sack in the first quarter against Clemson ... The Blue Raiders brought 74 players to Clemson ... WR [Shane Blissard](#), a walk-on, made his first career reception early in the first quarter ... Clemson's 61-yard punt return for a TD was the first against the Blue Raiders since Oklahoma's Reggie Smith went 61 yards for a score on Sept. 23, 2006 ... WR [Shane Blissard](#) started the

second half against Clemson ... QB [Dwight Dasher](#)'s 3rd quarter TD pass was the 12th of his career ... CB [Marcus Udell](#) came up with the first interception of his career early in the third quarter that set up a chance for the Blue Raiders to get back in the game ... LB [Norman Washington](#) forced his first career fumble late in the third quarter ... Walk-on [Andrew Banks](#) made his first career snap at QB early in the third quarter and also made his first completion.

Printed on May 23, 2012

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/40806>