

September 11, 2009

Blue Raiders ready for home opener

Blackout shirts SOLDOUT for second year in a row

Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Since the Rick Stockstill era as head coach began, the trend has been for Middle Tennessee's football team to make dramatic improvement from the first game to the second.

In Stockstill's inaugural season of 2006, the Blue Raiders opened with a 7-6 squeaker over Florida International at home. A much stronger showing came the following week on the road at Maryland.

After a disappointing defeat at Florida Atlantic to open the 2007 season, MTSU bounced back to score 35 first half points in a nationally televised game at Louisville. Last year, an opening loss to Troy was followed by the biggest home win in school history, an attention-getting 24-14 victory over Maryland.

So the stage is set for Saturday night when, in the second game of the season, Middle Tennessee will host Memphis in a renewal of a long rivalry. Kickoff is set for 6:07 pm CDT at Floyd Stadium.

MTSU and Memphis will be meeting for the 22nd time in a series that the Blue Raiders lead 13-7-1. It is only the second time, however, that the two teams have played since 1954. It will be the first visit of Memphis to Murfreesboro since 1953, when a late goal-line stand preserved a 26-20 Blue Raider win.

The series renewal came in 2007 when MTSU went to Memphis and beat the Tigers 21-7 behind 410 yards of offense behind then-freshman QB [Dwight Dasher](#).

Dasher, now a junior, will once again lead the team against Memphis. He will be directing offensive coordinator Tony Franklin's spread offense, one that looked much better in the second half of last week's 37-14 loss at Clemson. With veterans such as [Patrick Honeycutt](#), [Desmond Gee](#), [Sancho McDonald](#), [Gene Delle Donne](#) and [Chris McClover](#), plus junior college transfer [Garrett Andrews](#) and walk-on [Shane Blissard](#) to throw to, the Raiders should present a lot of weapons for the Memphis defense to worry about. Rushing will be in the capable hands, and feet, of Dasher and speedsters [Phillip Tanner](#) and D. D. Kyles.

Defensively, MTSU will have to stop the tall and fast receivers that Memphis will bring to town. The average height of the Tigers pass-catching corp is 6-3, two inches taller than the Raiders' tallest defensive back. Since the secondary is considered the strongest part of the Raider defense, it should be an interesting matchup.

The defensive front, led at Clemson by senior [Chris McCoy](#) and linebackers senior [Cam Robinson](#) and junior [Antwan Davis](#), will need to be very aggressive in putting heat on Memphis quarterback Arkelon Hall, as well as stopping hard-running Tiger back Curtis Steele, who gained 90 yards and scored twice last week against Ole Miss.

The game will be televised locally on CSS (Chan. 27) as well as on ESPN 360 online.

BLACKOUT SHIRTS SOLD OUT

For the second year in a row, the Middle Tennessee athletic department has sold out of Blackout shirts as announced by the marketing officer earlier in the day.



The Blue Raiders open the 2009 home season Saturday against in-state rival Memphis. Kickoff is set for 6:07 PM. ()

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