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## Blue Raider football opens Sun Belt action with win

### Middle Tennessee earns fourth-straight win over North Texas

Athletic Communications

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Freshman Benjamin Cunningham scored the game's first touchdown on a 50-yard catch as Middle Tennessee defeated North Texas, 37-21. (Bradley Lambert)

**DENTON, Texas** - Middle Tennessee football opened Sun Belt action by winning its third-straight game and improved on its best start in eight years with a 37-21 victory at North Texas Saturday evening in front of 22,346 at Fouts Field in Denton, Texas. The three-game winning streak is the first for the Blue Raiders since they won three late last season, while the 3-1 start is the second best in the school's FBS (1999-present) era, following the 5-0 opening by the 2001 squad.

North Texas wanted to threaten on its first possession following a 73-yard opening kickoff return, however, the Blue Raider defense allowed just four yards on the drive before Rod Isaac blocked a 37-yard field goal attempt by Jeremy Knott for the second blocked kick in as many weeks for MT.

Middle Tennessee (3-1, 1-0 Sun Belt) would get the ball at its own 20-yard line after the touchback following the blocked kick. In just six plays, Dasher led the squad down the field by picking up 63 total yards on the first possession. He connected on a 50-yard strike to [Benjamin Cunningham](#) at 11:38 for the game's first score down the right sideline. It was his first completion of the contest.

On the next North Texas drive, [Danny Carmichael](#) forced a Jamaal Jackson fumble and [Jeremy Kellem](#) fell on the loose ball to return it to the Blue Raider side with a short field, needing only 36 yards to pay dirt. Three plays later, Dasher found [Chris McClover](#) wide open across the middle inside the 10-yard line moving the ball to the nine. The completion set up an [Alan Gendreau](#) field goal four plays later, which put the Blue Raiders ahead, 10-0, on a 20-yard field goal with 9:17 to go in the first quarter.

Following a [David DeFatta](#) punt two possessions later, Lance Dunbar went 66 yards up the middle to bring the Mean Green back within three, 10-7, with 1:47 remaining in the first quarter. Middle Tennessee used the remaining first quarter time before Gendreau hit his second field goal for a 13-7 advantage on a 31-yarder with 14:04 left in the half.

[Kevin Brown](#) would pick off a Riley Dodge pass at the North Texas (1-3, 0-1 Sun Belt) 42 and return it to the six on a 36-yard return. Three plays later, Dasher took the ball himself around the right end on a six-yard carry to increase the lead to 13, 20-7, at the 11:55 mark of the second quarter.

After the teams traded punts, including one that saw the Mean Green pin the Blue Raiders down to their own 2-yard line halfway through the second period, Middle Tennessee punched the ball across the opposing goal line again at 4:43. Dasher rushed into the end zone for his second score of the contest, this time to the left pylon, on a 2-yard carry for a 27-7 edge. It capped a 98-yard drive on 12 plays for the longest scoring drive of the campaign and second longest in four years under head coach Rick Stockstill.

Gendreau tacked on the final points of the half with 22 seconds left on a career long 48-yard field goal after the final drive was halted, which increased the intermission lead to 30-7.

The second half saw North Texas come out with greater urgency. Mean Green quarterback Riley Dodge capped a third-quarter drive with a four-yard run at 7:49, which saw the Blue Raider lead shrink to 30-14. Dodge accounted for 46 combined yards through the air and on the ground during the 62-yard possession.

North Texas threatened to score again following a MT punt, but [Emmanuel Perez](#) stripped Dodge of the ball and [Derrick Crumpton](#) jumped on it to return the ball to the Blue Raiders at their own 10-yard line. Middle Tennessee could not convert the turnover into points, and DeFatta was forced to punt once again.

The Mean Green converted the ensuing drive into another touchdown, Dunbar's second of the game, with two seconds remaining in the third quarter to pull within 30-21 entering the final period. Dunbar took the handoff from Dodge and raced up the right side from 18 yards away.

On the Blue Raiders' second possession of the fourth quarter, Dasher completed a 24-yard strike to [Desmond Gee](#) to capitalize on an unsportsmanlike penalty on the North Texas defense to push the margin back to 16, 37-21, with 10:54 remaining. Dasher's touchdown pass put him over the 200-yard mark for the fourth-straight game this season.

Kellem came away with his second turnover of the contest when he intercepted a Dodge pass with 3:39 to play on a ball that seemed as if the quarterback was trying to throw it away. Kellem, however, made a diving catch in the end zone for a touchback. Reserve quarterback [Brent Burnette](#) entered the game on the next drive for his first action of his career.

Neither team was able to find pay dirt again and Middle Tennessee picked up its fourth-consecutive win in the series.

Dasher finished with his fourth-straight 200-plus passing outing, completing 21-of-43 for 269 yards and two touchdowns. He was also the team's leading rusher with 75 yards on 16 carries and two scores. [Sancho McDonald](#) led the squad with 74 yards receiving on five receptions.

Crumpton paced the defense with eight tackles, leading topping [Alex Suber's](#) seven.

Dodge finished 35-of-54 for 313 yards and three interceptions for the Mean Green. Dunbar gathered 101 yards on the ground on just five carries, while Jackson led North Texas with 11 catches for 82 yards.

DaWaylon Cook was the top tackler for the Mean Green with 10 tackles, while Kylie Hill had nine stops.

The Blue Raiders will return to action in 10 days, Tuesday, Oct. 6, when they play at three-time defending conference champion Troy in Troy, Ala., on an ESPN2 national broadcast.

#### **Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:**

**GOOD START:** Middle Tennessee's win over North Texas ran its record to 3-1 on the season. The 3-1 start is the best beginning to a season for the Blue Raiders since they went 5-0 in 2001. It also marks the first time since 2001 the Blue Raiders won their conference opener that was on the road.

**ANOTHER BIG NIGHT FOR DASHER:** Junior quarterback [Dwight Dasher](#) registered his personal-best fourth straight 200-yard passing game when he completed 21 of 43 passes for 269 yards and two touchdowns. Dasher has now thrown for 1,028 yards this season after four games. Dasher also added 75 yards on the ground and two rushing scores.

**FIRST CAREER SCORE:** True freshman running back [Benjamin Cunningham](#) reached the end zone for the first time in his brief collegiate career. Cunningham took his first career reception 50 yards for Middle Tennessee's opening possession score against UNT.

**MORE ON CUNNINGHAM:** Freshman [Benjamin Cunningham](#) rushed a personal-best eight times for a career-high 58 yards. Cunningham's 27-yard run in the second quarter was the longest of his career and was the longest by a running back this season.

**ANOTHER BLOCK:** For the second game in a row, Middle Tennessee recorded a blocked field goal when [Rod Issac](#) rejected a Mean Green three-point attempt in the first quarter. It went down as the first career block for Issac and the ninth in the Rick Stockstill era. It also went down as the seventh blocked kick against North Texas and the 28th in the FBS era (since 1999). Overall in the FBS era, MT now has 11 blocked field goals, 9 punts, and 8 PATs.

**BROWN GETS PICK:** Junior safety [Kevin Brown](#) came up with his second interception of the season in the second quarter against North Texas. Brown returned the pick 36 yards down to the Mean Green six-yard line to set up a [Dwight Dasher](#) touchdown run. It was the fourth interception of Brown's career. Brown later added a second pick on North Texas' last play from scrimmage to raise his career tally to five.

**LONG DRIVE:** Middle Tennessee's 12 play, 98-yard scoring drive against North Texas went down as the second longest under Rick Stockstill. Since Stockstill took the reins in 2006, the Blue Raiders have put together five scoring drives of 90 or more yards with two coming in 2007, one in 2008, and now two this year. In 2007, the Blue Raiders had a 99-yard scoring drive at ULM and then a 91 yarder in the same game before putting together a 91-yard drive at Louisville. The 96 yarder against Memphis earlier this year went down as the longest under Stockstill at home and third longest overall.

**CAREER NIGHT FOR GENDREAU:** Middle Tennessee place-kicker [Alan Gendreau](#) enjoyed a career night in the win over North Texas. Gendreau, who nailed a career long 48 yarder at the end of the first half, matched his personal-best with three made field goals and went on to score a career-best 13 points. Gendreau is now 16-for-20 all-time in the field goal department and the 16 made three-pointers equals the 10th most in school history with Michael Robinson.

**SCORING MACHINE:** Middle Tennessee's offense has been in high gear during its three-game winning streak. In the three games, the Blue Raiders have scored a combined 100 points for an average of 33.3 per game. MT has now scored 30 or more points in

three straight games for the first time since 2006.

**QUICK HITTERS:** The Blue Raider defense forced five turnovers against North Texas and has now forced 13 in four games ... Middle Tennessee scored on its opening possession of the game for the second time this season and for the fourth time in the last six games dating back to last season ... Tonight's win was Middle Tennessee's SBC record 32nd league win ... Center [Mark Thompson](#) made his team-leading 28th straight start ... Freshman WR [Tavarres Jefferson](#) made his first collegiate start against UNT ... [Jeremy Kellem](#)'s fumble recovery in the first quarter and interception in the fourth was the 18th turnovers he has been responsible for in his 28-game career ... [Dwight Dasher](#) recorded his fifth and sixth career rushing touchdowns in the second quarter ... DE [Phillip Tinsley](#) played tonight for the first time since the Clemson game when he suffered a shoulder injury ... [Danny Carmichael](#) recorded his third forced fumble of the season tonight against North Texas ... [Derrick Crumpton](#) recovered his second fumble this season and the third of his career ... [Desmond Gee](#)'s fourth quarter touchdown reception was the ninth of his career and first since 2008 ... Rick Stockstill is now 4-0 against North Texas ... QB [Brent Burnette](#) played in his first collegiate game when he stepped into the lineup with 3:39 left in the game ... P [David DeFatta](#) attempted a career-high 10 punts, finishing with a 41.2 average ... He now has six inside the 20 in the last two games after one tonight.

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