

Blue Raiders fall in return home

Middle Tennessee welcomed first SEC foe to Floyd Stadium

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Missed opportunities in the red zone and second half turnovers were the story Saturday as host Middle Tennessee was held out of the end zone in a 27-6 loss to Mississippi State in front of 23,882 fans at Floyd Stadium on cold and blustery Hall of Fame Day in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Mississippi State was the first Southeastern Conference opponent to make an appearance at Floyd Stadium.

Neither team was able to mount much of an offense in the first quarter, which saw the first five total possessions resulted in punts. The Bulldogs were able to break free just past the halfway mark, at 6:24, when quarterback Tyson Lee went the distance on a 39-yard keeper for the game's first touchdown to cap a two-play drive and 7-0 MSU edge.



Mississippi State added more points early in the second half, at 11:42, when Derek Depasquale chipped in a 14-yard field goal for a 10-0 lead. The Blue Raiders held the Bulldogs out of the end zone despite a 16-play drive covering 78 yards. The possession, which was continued after a roughing the punter penalty on the next-to-last play of the first quarter, was halted at the seven-yard line.

Middle Tennessee (3-3) responded on its next possession with quarterback Dwight Dasher stepping onto the field for the first time. The junior quarterback marched the Blue Raiders deep into Bulldog territory only to be stopped at the one-yard line. Alan Gendreau then came on and knocked home an

18-yard field goal at 7:10 to close the margin to seven, 10-3, on a 12-play, 62-yard drive covering the next 4:32.

Another long sprint up the middle put MSU ahead, 17-3, as Anthony Dixon took the handoff and went 57 yards at 5:37 of the second quarter on the visitors' next drive as part of a three-play, 69-yard possession.

The Middle Tennessee defense racked up back-to-back sacks on the next Bulldog drive, turning the ball over after a Mississippi State (3-4) punt. The Blue Raiders, taking the ball at their own 49, had another promising drive stopped once it reached the red zone. The Bulldog defense was again able to keep MT out of pay dirt, forcing another Gendreau field goal. The sophomore tied the school record for consecutive field goals at eight on a 24-yarder with 39 seconds remaining in the half.

Middle Tennessee was facing a 3rd-and-15, but Dasher rolled out to his right and found Shane Blissard at the 9-yard line to continue the drive on a 22-yard strike near the sideline. It was the signal-caller's second long completion of the possession. He also found Harold Turner on the drive's first play for 25 yards.

On Mississippi State's first drive of the second half, the Blue Raider defense forced a fourth-and-short at its own 28. The defense, facing the one-chain length to the first down, stopped the Bulldogs and gave its offense the ball back on downs. However, MT could not gain any yardage on its possession and was forced to punt for the sixth time.

Again, Middle Tennessee's defense stood tall against the Mississippi State spread offense. Derek Depasquale increased the Bulldog lead to 14, 20-6, on a 36-yard field goal with 3:37 remaining in the third quarter. MSU originally lined up for the attempt at the 14-yard line, but a delay of game penalty backed the kick up five yards.

Early in the fourth quarter, Dasher connected with Chris McClover on a 36-yard touchdown; however, the play was overturned after an offensive pass interference call kept the Bulldogs up by two scores. On the next play, Corey Broomfield stepped in front of a Dasher attempt for an interception. The pick returned the ball to MSU at its own 27.

The Bulldogs were forced to punt and Heath Hutchins sent the kick to the Blue Raider nine-yard line. However, the play was ruled to be first touched at the 26 and was upheld following a challenge by the Mississippi State coaching staff. Dasher had a 12-yard run up the middle on the possession's first play, but two plays later, he again was picked off by Broomfield.

Middle Tennessee got possession back after a three-and-out, but Dasher's throwing woes continued with his third interception on the first play, this time by Johnthan Banks. Banks registered his second Blue Raider pass, stepping in front of a Sancho McDonald attempt late in the final quarter for the fourth MT turnover.

The Bulldogs marched down the field to decide the final margin after the interception. Dixon crossed the goal line at 3:25 from a yard out, capping a three-play, 25-yard possession and extending the visitor lead to 27-6.

Mississippi State controlled the line of scrimmage with a 333-248 advantage on total yards, including a 178-42 edge on the ground. Dixon finished with a game-high 135 yards on 27 carries with two

scores, while Lee added 38 yards. Lee was 14-of-20 through the air for 155 yards.

Dasher was the team's leading ball carrier with 47 yards, while he completed 50.0 percent of his passes (11-of-22) for 129 yards.

The Blue Raiders will return to Sun Belt action next week when they play host to Western Kentucky at 2:30 p.m. live on CSS. The game will serve as Homecoming for Middle Tennessee.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE POST-GAME NOTES:

ANOTHER RECORD FOR ATTENDANCE: Today's announced attendance of 23,882 went down as the fifth largest in school history. Three of the top five attendance games have come under Rick Stockstill, including six of the top 10. The back-to-back game total of 51,987 fans marks the most in consecutive games in school history.

GENDREAU REMAINS PERFECT: PK Alan Gendreau ran his streak to eight consecutive field goals made with his two field goals today against Mississippi State. The streak matches the longest in school history set by Gendreau in 2008 and Kelly Potter in 1984. Gendreau is now 8-for-8 on the season and 18 of 22 for his career. The 18 made field goals moves him into ninth place all-time surpassing Kenny Nolan (1971-72).

TURNER TIME: Walk-on freshman wide receiver Harold Turner saw his most action as a collegian against Mississippi State. The Decatur, Ga., native hauled in his first career receptions to finish with three catches for 45 yards.

GEE PASSES WRIGHT: With 74 all-purpose yards today against Mississippi State, senior Desmond Gee surpassed Kerry Wright for eighth place on the all-time list. Gee entered the game with 3,587 career all-purpose yards and ran that total to 3,661 with his effort today. Gee is now tracking Vince Hall for seventh place. Hall had 3,796 yards during his career (1981-84).

QUICK HITTERS: Center Mark Thompson saw his streak of consecutive starts end today at 29 and now fellow offensive lineman Jamal Lewis owns the team's longest streak with 23 ... QB Brent Burnette, a redshirt freshman, made his first collegiate start today while center Chris Hawkins made the second start of his career ... MT fell to 3-17 against SEC teams all-time with the loss to MSU ... DB Kenneth Gilstrap made an appearance on offense today and made his first collegiate reception, for 11 yards, early in the fourth quarter ... Today's kickoff time of 11:32 AM marked the earliest home kickoff time since the Blue Raiders started the Louisiana-Lafayette game on Oct. 19, 2002 at 11 AM ... Today's game was the 11th nationally-televised game for the Blue Raiders all-time and the ninth under Rick Stockstill ... DE Jarrett Crittenton, who has been out of action since midway through spring drills with a knee injury, saw his first action as a Blue Raider today against MSU ... Ten different players caught passes for the Blue Raiders today ... Middle Tennessee failed to score a touchdown for the first time since Sept. 15, 2007 when LSU blanked the Blue Raiders, 44-0 ... LB Antwan Davis recorded the most tackles of his career with eight today against the Bulldogs ... S Kevin Brown finished with seven stops, one more than his season-best six set in the opener at Clemson ... S Jeremy Kellem posted his first tackle for loss, a sack, on the campaign ... CB Alex Suber tied his career high with two pass breakups, matching the effort he tallied at Maryland earlier this season.

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