Dasher sparks Blue Raiders to Homecoming win over Hilltoppers

MT sets Stockstill era records for points, yards

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Dwight Dasher's career day on a record-breaking afternoon spurred Middle Tennessee football to a 62-24 win over rival Western Kentucky in front of 17,787 on a cool Homecoming outing at Floyd Stadium in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Dasher finished 22-of-35 for 355 yards and three scores, the eighth-highest passing day in school history. He added two more scores on the ground as the Blue Raiders scored the most points and gained the most yards (646) under head coach Rick Stockstill (2006-present).

Middle Tennessee weathered a pair of pass interference calls on Western Kentucky's opening drive to hold the Hilltoppers to only a field goal, a 37-yarder, by Casey Tinius at 8:47 of the first quarter. The Blue Raiders were whistled for two 15-yard penalties, allowing WKU to keep the ball and advance to the MT 10-yard line. A pair of stops preceded a sack of 11 yards by Danny Carmichael on third down, forcing the field goal.

The Blue Raiders drove 47 yards the ensuing possession on 11 plays to even the score. It was capped by a 38-yard field goal by Alan Gendreau at 5:56, to tie the game at 3-3.

The Middle Tennessee (4-3, 2-1 Sun Belt) defense held firm while its offense started to light up. On the second play of the second quarter, Dasher found Chris McClover along the left sideline for a 23-

yard touchdown strike to put the Blue Raiders ahead, 10-3, with 14:40 remaining in the half. MT covered 53 yards on just seven plays over 2:49 on the scoring drive.

On the next MT drive, Dasher located Harold Turner on a 52-yard strike across the middle on only the Blue Raiders' second play to pull ahead, 17-3, with 12:32 to go. The redshirt freshman caught the ball then sprinted past the Hilltopper defensive backfield into pay dirt.

Another long touchdown pass by Dasher capped the next MT scoring drive. This time, he tossed a 34-yarder to McClover at the 8:09 mark of the second quarter to push the Blue Raider advantage to 24-3 to conclude the eight-play, 78-yard possession.

The pair connected again to set up the next Blue Raider touchdown. The completion went for 32 yards, moving the ball down to the Western Kentucky six-yard line. Three plays later, Dasher took the ball himself from less than a yard out, for a 31-3 lead with 1:08 remaining in the half. The overall scoring drive covered 74 yards on 10 plays elapsing just 3:28 off the clock. It proved to be the longest drive in terms of time of the game for MT.

On the final play of the first half, with six seconds remaining, a 42-yard Hail Mary pass from Kawaun Jakes was sent down the left sideline into the end zone. The ball bounced around among both teams a couple times before landing in the hands of Jake Gaebler to pull the Hilltoppers within 21, 31-10, at the intermission.

Blue Raider Desmond Gee grabbed the opening kickoff of the second half and went 74 yards up the right sideline to start the Middle Tennessee possession at the WKU 17-yard line. Although the drive started in close, the Western Kentucky (0-7, 0-3 Sun Belt) defense stood tall and held the Blue Raiders to a 29-yard field goal by Gendreau to increase the advantage to 34-10 with 13:57 remaining in the third quarter.

Bobby Rainey broke free on the ensuing kickoff return, but as he crossed midfield, Sammy Seamster stripped him of the ball with Kenneth Gilstrap coming up with the recovery to return the ball back to MT. Two plays later, Gilstrap took a reverse and outran the Hilltopper defense on a 49-yard dash for a 41-10 lead with 13:09 to go in the third period.

WKU responded on its next drive, as Jakes went to the left pylon from four yards away at 11:04 to cut the deficit to 24, 41-17, to close a six-play, 72-yard possession. He dumped a 31-yard pass to Marell Booker on a first down toss, moving the ball inside the Blue Raider 10 and setting up the score.

D.D. Kyles punched the ball across the goal line from less than a yard out on two consecutive plays. His first scoring carry was nullified after instant replay, but the Blue Raiders gave it to him on the next play and he again found pay dirt as MT built its lead to 48-17 with 5:51 remaining in the third stanza.

As the clock moved into the fourth quarter, Gabeler hauled in his second touchdown reception of the afternoon when he was found across the middle by backup quarterback Brandon Smith on a 16-yard toss at 14:26 of the final quarter to trim the gap in half, 48-24.

Dasher stayed on the ground for his fifth and final touchdown of the day, scurrying 25 yards and breaking tackles along the way, for a 55-24 advantage with 13:04 remaining in the game. The drive

started by a 30-yard sprint from Kyles.

Backup signal-caller Brent Burnette entered the game on the Blue Raiders' next possession. He was 2-of-2 during the drive, including hitting Turner on a fourth down pass from 10 yards away to jump the lead to 62-24 with 8:57 left.

Booker saw daylight for 32 yards on the next Western Kentucky kickoff return, but as he slipped past the Blue Raider coverage, he stepped on the sideline stopping a potential touchdown run.

The final Middle Tennessee possession was its only one of the game to end by downs.

Middle Tennessee will hit the road for its next game, a 3 p.m. Central kick, at Florida Atlantic in Boca Raton, Fla., next week.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:

BIG GAME FOR MCCLOVER: Senior Chris McClover turned in the best game of his career in the win over WKU. McClover caught six passes for 149 yards and a career-best two touchdown passes. It was the second 100-yard game of the season and the second of his career. McClover had seven catches for 110 yards earlier this year at Maryland.

DASHER PASSING: Dwight Dasher passed for a career-best 355 yards in the win over WKU and that total went down as the eighth most in school history for a single-game. Dasher has now passed for over 200 yards for the sixth time in seven games this season to run his career total to eight. Dasher, who now owns two 300-yard passing games, ran his season passing total to 1,757 yards. It marked the 24th 200-yard passing game under Rick Stockstill.

DASHER BACK TO FORM: QB Dwight Dasher, who struggled in his previous two games, was back to his old tricks in the win over WKU. The junior accounted for 421 (5th most in school history) of Middle Tennessee's 646 yards of total offense while adding three touchdown passes and a touchdown run. Dasher entered the game ranked 10th nationally in total offense and first in the Sun Belt Conference. For the year, Dasher now has 2,174 yards of total offense and with his effort against WKU he surpassed Clint Marks, Billy Walker and Andrico Hines on the single-season list to rank eighth.

DASHER IN TOP 10: With three touchdown passes against WKU, junior Dwight Dasher moved into the top 10 on Middle Tennessee's career list. Dasher now has 22 career touchdown passes and is tied for 10th all-time with Bob Hallum. Dasher now has 11 touchdown passes on the season which is the most he has ever had in a single-season.

GENDREAU SETS RECORD: Sophomore PK Alan Gendreau ran his consecutive made field goal streak to nine to establish a new school record when he nailed a 38-yarder in the first quarter against WKU. Gendreau broke the previous mark set by himself last year and again this year and by Kelly Potter in 1984. His first quarter field goal put his career point total at 102 to surpass M.A. Robinson for 10th place on the Blue Raiders' all-time points scored by kickers list. He needs seven more points to take over eighth from Dick Martin who had 117 points from 1985 to 1986.

CARMICHAEL MOVES UP TFL LIST: With two tackles for loss today, senior Danny Carmichael ran his career total to 26.0. That puts him in a tie with Emanuel Toles (1979-82) on the all-time list at MT.

SILVER BRITCHES: Middle Tennessee broke out some new apparel against WKU Saturday. The Blue Raiders donned silver pants for the first time since the Boots Donnelly era which ended in 1998.

HONEYCUTT OVER 100: With three catches against WKU, senior Patrick Honeycutt ran his career total to 102. That total puts Honeycutt ninth on the all-time career list at MT and makes him just the 10th player in school history to reach triple figures in catches.

BUSY DAY FOR GILSTRAP: Freshman Kenneth Gilstrap was literally everywhere against the Hilltoppers today. Along with playing defensive back on obvious throwing downs, he also earned his first career start at wide receiver. In the third quarter he was playing on the kickoff team and recovered a fumble. Two plays later on offense, he took a reverse pitch and ran 49 yards untouched into the endzone for his first career touchdown.

LOTS OF 'O' TODAY: Middle Tennessee churned out 646 yards of offense and 62 points in the win over WKU. The yardage total went down as the most under Rick Stockstill, breaking the previous best mark of 555 yards set against Louisville in 2007. The 62 points also went down as the most ever by a Rick Stockstill coached team and the most by the Blue Raiders since they put up 70 in a win over Idaho on Oct. 6, 2001. The 646 yards rank third on the program's all-time list and is the second most Middle Tennessee has put up in a Sun Belt Conference game, trailing only that Idaho game when the Blue Raiders gained 685 yards.

DEFENSE TURNS UP THE HEAT: Middle Tennessee's defense has been known for its disruptive play under Manny Diaz and it was on full display against WKU. The defense accounted for 12 tackles for loss, five sacks and gave up just 250 yards with most of that coming in the second half.

QUICK HITTERS: Today's game was the 60th meeting all-time in football between Middle Tennessee and Western Kentucky ... Sophomore Alex Stuart made his first start of the season at right guard ... Walk-on WR Harold Turner recorded the first touchdown of his career when he reeled in a 52-yard pass in the second quarter ... Middle Tennessee ran its record to 48-20-2 all-time on Homecoming ... Today's victory was the Blue Raiders' 33rd all-time SBC win which is tops in the conference ... DB Kenneth Gilstrap made his first career start today against WKU and it was at wide receiver ... Middle Tennessee's 28 first quarter points matched the most ever scored in a quarter under Rick Stockstill (also 28 against North Texas in 2008) ... Desmond Gee's 74-yard kickoff return to begin the second half was the longest of his career ... D.D. Kyles had his second rushing touchdown of the season when he scored in the third quarter ... Marcus Udell recorded the second interception of his career early in the fourth quarter

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