

November 6, 2009

Blue Raiders glad to be home; ready for FIU MT beginning key month with tough SBC matchup

Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - With a 3-1 Sun Belt Conference record, and three consecutive home games against conference foes, Middle Tennessee's football team is poised to make a November stretch run.

Step one will come on Saturday, when Middle Tennessee, 5-3 overall, hosts a rapidly improving FIU team at 3:30 pm. The game will be televised as part of the Sun Belt Conference TV package on ESPN's GamePlan as well as on broadband on ESPN360.com. Middle Tennessee Mass Communications students will produce the game.

A much improved running game, coupled with a defense that won't quit and excellent play from special teams, gives hope to Blue Raider fans that their holiday season may include another game.

But, as Lee Corso is so fond of saying, 'not so fast, my friend.' And Blue Raider Head Coach Rick Stockstill echoes that sentiment 100 percent.

"Right now, we are just trying to get to 6-3. That is our goal, our focus, and all that we are concentrating on. We are not worried about two weeks from now, three weeks from now, or what happens in December," said Stockstill. "FIU is a really good football team, and this is going to be another fourth quarter game. They are very athletic, and may be the fastest team we have played since Troy."

Middle Tennessee is tied for second place in the SBC with UL-Monroe, with both having lost to league-leading Troy. ULM will play at North Texas on Saturday. Middle Tennessee's defense has stood tall all year, and the special teams have improved greatly over the course of the first eight games, but the most significant improvement has been in the Blue Raiders ground attack. Credit the offensive line, and sophomore running back D. D. Kyles.

"It is a direct reflection of the offensive line, and I think the offensive line played their best game of the year last week at FAU," declared Stockstill. "They were dominating against Western, and at times against Mississippi State. It's an evolution over the past couple of weeks. They are playing with a nastier mentality, getting people on the ground, and taking great pride in protecting the quarterback."

Kyles, a 6-1, 192 pounder with sprinters speed, had the first 100-yard rushing game of his career with 140 yards on 13 carries against FAU.

"D.D. has changed his practice habits. He is practicing harder now because he realized if he wants to play, he had better become a better practice player," noted Stockstill.

Quarterback [Dwight Dasher](#) also rushed for 108 yards against FAU, giving the Blue Raiders two 100-yard rushers in the game. Dasher now has rushed for 525 yards, and passed for 1,847 more, to rank 8th nationally in total offense with an average of 296.5 yards a game.

Defensively, Middle Tennessee is 13th in the nation in forcing turnovers, which was a key to the win over FAU last week. The Blue Raiders intercepted two passes and also blocked two punts and a field goal, returning the first blocked punt for a touchdown. Senior cornerback [Marcus Udell](#), who entered the game in the second quarter for the injured [Alex Suber](#), intercepted two passes and blocked a field goal.

Walk-ons continue to contribute to the success of the Blue Raiders this season. [Sherman Neal](#), a junior cornerback and member of the punt block team, scooped up a punt blocked by [SaCoby Carter](#) in the first quarter, and ran it back 29 yards for a score. For his part in the game-changing play, Neal was named the Sun Belt Conference Special Teams Player of the Week. He is one of nine walk-ons to play this season, and the third to score a touchdown. Wide receivers [Shane Blissard](#) and [Harold Turner](#) have both caught touchdown passes.

Placekicker [Alan Gendreau](#) hit his first two attempts against FAU to stretch his school-record consecutive field goal mark to 12 before missing a wind-blown 46-yard attempt in the third quarter. Gendreau is 12-for-13 in the field goal department for the season.

Middle Tennessee will have to play well in all facets of the game again this week if it has any hopes of coming out on top against a stout FIU team. The Panthers have two of the most dangerous weapons in the Sun Belt. Quarterback Paul McCall has thrown for 1,884 yards and seven touchdowns so far this season, while sophomore T.Y. Hilton has caught 44 of those passes for 462 yards



D.D. Kyles ran for a career-high 140 yards and a touchdown last week in the win over FAU. ()

and four touchdowns.

The series between the two schools is tied 2-2, with each team winning their home games. FIU defeated the Blue Raiders 31-21 last year in Miami behind McCall and Hilton, who hooked up on a 63-yard touchdown pass early in the 4th quarter to put the game out of reach.

Saturday's game is part of a special "Run For The Bowl" ticket package which include tickets to all three of Middle Tennessee's remaining home games. Fans can purchase tickets to all three for \$30, or to two games for \$20.

In addition to the telecasts on ESPN GamePlan and ESPN360.com, Blue Raider fans can listen to the MTSU-FIU game on the Blue Raider Network, featuring Chip Walters and Kelly Holcomb. Network affiliates are WMOT-FM 89.5, 101.5 FM, and WGNS 1450 AM in Murfreesboro, WNSR AM 560 in Nashville, and 103.9 FM in Bowling Green, KY.

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