Blue Raiders put exclamation point on historic season

Dasher dazzles, defense dandy in convincing 38-19 road win

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MONROE, La. - Middle
Tennessee put the finishing
touches on the most
successful gridiron season of
the FBS era with a convincing
38-19 win against LouisianaMonroe at Malone Stadium
Saturday.

The Blue Raiders (9-3, 7-1) notched their ninth win by putting an exclamation mark on a persuasive season that now includes: most single-season wins (9) of the FBS era, most SBC wins (7) in a single season, one of three SBC schools to win nine games in a season (North Texas, 2003; Troy, 2009) and a current six-game win streak. The nine wins for Middle Tennessee is the most in a season since 1992.

They will now await a postseason bowl destination they believe is sure to come. It would be the program's second in four seasons under Head Coach Rick Stockstill.



Middle Tennessee climaxed its dynamic regular season in much the same manner it has achieved success all season - nasty defense, productive offense and special teams contributions, but the big story was junior quarterback Dwight Dasher who danced his way into the Blue Raider record books with his arm and legs.

Dasher ran for two touchdowns and threw for two more to lead the offensive charge that included

306 yards of total offense. Dasher's two touchdowns enabled him to tie Mickey Corwins's single-season mark of 21 touchdowns, set in 1984. He also became Middle Tennessee's career leader for rushing yards by a quarterback with 88 against ULM, giving him 1,676 career rushing yards to break Marvin Collier's mark of 1,652 set from 1985 to 1988. Dasher was 10-of-18 through the air for 116 yards. He did throw two interceptions.

Defense also was a staple as it dominated the Warhawks after allowing a touchdown on their opening possession. The dandy defensive effort included three interceptions, one for a touchdown, four sacks and 12 tackles for loss. Chris McCoy continued his stellar campaign with ferocious play that included 2.5tackles for loss. Alex Suber was a defensive wizard with eight tackles, including one for loss, an interception and a pass break-up, and linebacker Danny Carmichael continued to make plays from one side of the field to the other, collecting 10 tackles including one for loss. Suber, Jeremy Kellem and Kevin Brown had the interceptions.

Special teams also played a role with kickoff returns that put the offensive in good field position and kicker Alan Gendreau added a 40-yard field goal.

After falling behind early, Middle Tennessee tied the game 7-7 late in the first quarter on another quick-strike touchdown as the Blue Raiders marched 66 yards on five plays in just 1:25 and scored on Dasher's 2-yard run with 2:52 remaining in the opening frame. Garrett Andrews beat the secondary for a 42-yard reception from Dasher to set up the short scoring run.

The staunch Blue Raider defense gave the offense another great opportunity when Brown registered his fourth interception of the season, which provided the defense with its 15 of the season, on the Warhawks' next possession and returned it to the ULM 21. Middle Tennessee was on the move once again but Dasher threw his second interception of the first quarter. Dasher also was intercepted at the ULM 2 on the Blue Raiders' first possession.

Although the offense had squandered two scoring opportunities in the first quarter, the defense continued to rise to the occasion and hold the opposition at bay. Warhawk Greg James returned the first interception to the ULM 20 but a Chris McCoy sack pushed them back and ultimately led to a missed field goal from 45 yards out.

The Blue Raiders tied the single-season sack record on the next defensive possession when Carmichael's takedown of Trey Revell provided the 36th of the season, equaling the mark for most sacks set by the 2006 squad. It was a quarter in which the defense clamped down and established itself with two big sacks and an interception.

Middle Tennessee's defense continued to flex its collective muscle at the start of the second quarter. ULM was looking to cash in on Dasher's second interception when it drove to the Blue Raider 3; however, the defense forced a 25-yard field goal from Radi Jabour to provide ULM a 10-7 lead with 9:10 remaining in the first half.

The lead was short-lived as Dasher engineered an answer to ULM's score with nifty running and an accurate arm. Middle Tennessee took its first lead when Shane Blissard reeled in a 6-yard touchdown pass from Dasher and Gendreau followed with the extra point to provide the Blue Raiders with a 14-10 advantage with 6:33 remaining before intermission. Dasher ran for 32 of Middle Tennessee's 45 yards on the scoring drive.

The fun was far from finished.

Defense, special teams and offense played a part in a momentum-building score just before the half. The blue-clad defense solved ULM's offense to give the ball back to the offense late in the half. D.D. Kyles' big kickoff return gave the ball to the offense at the ULM 45, where Dasher had 2:43 to make something happen.

It didn't take that long. Dasher found Patrick Honeycutt for an 18-yard aerial strike in the back of the end zone and Gendreau added the point after to give Middle Tennessee a 21-10 cushion with 33 seconds remaining in the half. The drive covered 73 yards in six plays with Dasher connecting with Honeycutt for two critical receptions - the first of which was on third-and-9 from the ULM 44 to keep the drive alive. Dasher's second touchdown of the half was his 21st of the season, tying Mickey Corwin for the single-season mark set in 1984.

The Blue Raiders dominated play in the first half as the offense rolled up 219 yards while holding ULM to just 165. If not for two interceptions in the red zone, the 21 points Middle Tennessee scored could have been even greater.

Defense continued to be a major part of the framework of this victory and forced its second straight three-and-out to start the second half when Alex Suber's sack backed up ULM, forcing a fourth-and-13 and a punt. The sack was Middle Tennessee's 37th of the season, breaking the 2006 mark for single-season sacks. Jabari Lattimore increased the sack record to 38 with his sixth of the season in the fourth quarter.

ULM would not go away. Middle Tennessee misfired on a 47-yard field goal on its second series of the third quarter and ULM followed it up with a 37-yard field goal to pull to within 21-13 with 6:13 remaining in the frame.

Suber continued to be a play-making ball-hawker and came up with his first interception of the season on ULM's next drive but it was his dazzling 56-yard return inside the Warhawks' 10 that was pivotal.

Two plays later Dasher dashed in from the 9 and Gendreau added the extra point to give Middle Tennessee a 28-13 lead with 4:10 remaining. The run gave Dasher 68 yards rushing for the game and enabled him to surpass Marvin Collier's mark of 1,652 for most career yards rushing by a quarterback.

Gendreau opened the fourth quarter scoring with a 40-yard field goal as the Blue Raiders stretched what proved to be an insurmountable lead of 31-13 with 13:08 remaining.

The dynamic Blue Raider defense got into the scoring act next when Kellem picked off a pass and raced 58 yards untouched to stake Middle Tennessee to a 38-13 lead with 10:50 remaining. It was Kellem who provided the exclamation point but Carmichael delivered the knockout blow that created it when he came off the edge and crushed quarterback Cody Wells to set the wheels in motion.

All of the teamwork and mechanisms that provided one of the greatest seasons in program history were on display in Monroe-Louisiana as Middle Tennessee continued its surge.

Follow GoBlueRaiders.com for postseason possibilities as they become available.

POSTGAME NOTES

9 IS FINE: With the win today over Louisiana-Monroe, Middle Tennessee ran its record to 9-3 on the season and reached the 9-win total for the first time in the FBS era (since 1999). The last time Middle Tennessee won nine regular season games was in 1992 when the Blue Raiders finished 10-3. Middle Tennessee is also just the second team in the history of the Sun Belt Conference to win nine games. The only other 9-win SBC team was North Texas in 2003 as the Mean Green finished 9-4. Troy could become the third team with a game later tonight at ULL.

SIX IN A ROW: Middle Tennessee has now won an FBS era record six games in a row to break the previous mark of five in a row set by the 2001 team. The six straight wins are the most by the Blue Raiders since they won six consecutive games in 1990.

PERMANENT CAPTAINS: Earlier in the week, the Middle Tennessee players voted on permanent team captains for the year. The winners were Patrick Honeycutt, Desmond Gee, Danny Carmichael, Brandon Perry, and Alex Suber.

BROWN, SUBER GET PICKS: Junior safety Kevin Brown came up with his fourth interception of the season and the sixth of his career when he recorded one in the first quarter. Alex Suber also picked off his first pass of the season and the fourth of his career to set up a Blue Raider touchdown in the third quarter.

KELLEM TO THE HOUSE: Junior Jeremy Kellem scored his second touchdown of the season when he returned an interception in the fourth quarter 58 yards. It marked Kellem's third interception of the season and the eighth of his career with two of them being returned for TDs. In 36 career games played, Kellem has been responsible for 23 turnovers (eight interceptions, four fumble recoveries, seven forced fumbles, four blocked punts).

RAIDERS BREAK SACK RECORD: With four sacks today against ULM, Middle Tennessee set a new single-season quarterback sacks record. Alex Suber's sack in the third quarter broke the record. The Blue Raiders broke the previous mark of 36 set by the 2006 team. MT now has 38 sacks for the season.

DASHER TIES RECORD: Dwight Dasher registered two touchdown passes against ULM to run his season total to 21. The 21 touchdown passes equals the most in a single-season at MT with Mickey Corwin who set the school mark in 1984. Dasher now owns 32 career touchdown passes to rank sixth all-time at MT.

ROBINSON TOPS 100: Senior Cam Robinson joined an elite group at Middle Tennessee with today's effort against ULM. With 10 tackles against ULM, Robinson reached triple figures for the season in stops with 104. Robinson is the first Blue Raider to hit triple figures in tackles since Will Martin had 100 tackles in 2003 and is just the third player in the FBS era. Mario Kelso had 106 stops in 1999 which was MT's first year of I-A football. Robinson's season total is the most by a linebacker at MT since Nathaniel Claybrooks had 108 stops in 1995.

DASHER BREAKS RUSHING RECORD: Dwight Dasher rushed for 88 yards against ULM to set a new career rushing record for quarterbacks at Middle Tennessee. Dasher now has 1,676 career rushing yards and broke the previous mark of 1,652 yards by Marvin Collier from 1985 to 1988.

QUICK HITTERS: Middle Tennessee moved to 18-1 under Rick Stockstill when scoring 30 or more

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points in a game and a perfect 8-0 this season ... Dwight Dasher recorded his 10th and 11th rushing TDs of the season to give him 14 for his career today against ULM ... DE Chris McCoy recorded his seventh quarterback sack of the season early in the first quarter to tie him for the second most in a season with Tavares Jones and Anthony Hicks ... Senior Mark Thompson played in his MT FBS record 49th career game today against ULM ... The secondary of Alex Suber, Kevin Brown, Rod Issac, and Jeremy Kellem made their 17th straight start as a unit today against ULM ... WR Shane Blissard's second quarter touchdown reception was the second of his career ... In the key month of November, Middle Tennessee has now won seven straight games dating back to last season (last loss was at Troy on Nov. 20, 2007 which was termed Black Tuesday) ... MT ran its conference record to 7-1 and the seven wins are the most SBC victories in Blue Raider history ... Dwight Dasher is now 13-4 all-time as the starter at quarterback ... The four road wins this season equal the most since the Blue Raiders had four in 2006

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