

October 1, 2005

Weaver's Block Preserves 17-15 Victory

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- **Jeremiah Weaver** blocked a last-second field goal and Middle Tennessee's defense held Vanderbilt more than 100 yards under its season average, as the Blue Raiders posted their first victory of the season and third straight over Vanderbilt, 17-15, Saturday night at Vanderbilt Stadium.

Video: [Football Game Highlights \(WMV\)](#)

The Blue Raiders (1-3) scored twice in the second quarter, first on a three-yard quarterback draw by **Clint Marks** and then later on an eight-yard scamper from **Eugene Gross** to take a 14-6 advantage at halftime.

But the Commodores (4-1) would not be denied at home, booting another field goal in the third quarter before adding a 16-yard TD toss from Jay Cutler to Erik Davis with 12:55 remaining in the game to take the lead. VU went for two after the TD, but **Dennis Burke** broke up the pass to keep the game at 15-14.

Middle Tennessee answered with a nine-play, 53-yard drive that culminated in a 29-yard field goal from **Colby Smith**, giving the Blue Raiders a 17-15 advantage.

Vandy's ensuing possession resulted in a punt, and Middle Tennessee returned the favor with less than three minutes to play, as Smith's punt was downed at the one yard line, his fourth of the game downed inside the 20.

But Cutler led his team down the field methodically, including a third-down completion with less than 20 seconds remaining. The Commodores downed the ball and turned it over to freshman Bryant Hahnfeldt, who was 3-for-3 in the game.

Weaver came bolting through from the right side to block the kick cleanly and send his team and the Blue Raider faithful into a frenzy. Middle Tennessee has defeated Vanderbilt in all three attempts in the I-A era, with the three games decided by a total of 12 points.

Gross finished with 72 yards on 19 carries, while Marks passed for 147 yards on 14-of-22.

The story of the game was the Blue Raider defense, which held the much-heralded Vandy offense more than 100 yards below its season average even though it spent more than 19 minutes of the first half and 35:28 overall of the game on the field.

Jonathan Harris' first career interception and 16-yard return set up the Marks three-yard run, and the defensive line and linebackers spent most of the night harassing Cutler. The unit recorded four hurries, one sack and five pass breakups.

Middle Tennessee gets its second off-week in a three-week span before heading to Florida Atlantic on October 15.

POSTGAME NOTES

MIDDLE TENNESSEE AT VANDERBILT

OCT. 1, 2005; NASHVILLE, TN

HARRIS GETS FIRST PICK: Junior safety **Jonathan Harris** made his first collegiate interception when he picked off Vanderbilt's Jay Cutler deep in Vandy territory early in the second quarter. Harris brought it back 16 yards to the two-yard line and the Blue Raiders

went on to capitalize with a touchdown run by **Clint Marks**. The interception is the fifth of the season for Middle Tennessee, who only had seven interceptions as a team all of 2004.

WEAVER RECORDS FIRST BLOCK: Senior **Jeremiah Weaver** added to the Middle Tennessee ledger of blocked kicks, but none has been bigger for the Blue Raiders. Weaver blocked a final field goal try of the contest, preserving the 17-15 victory. The block was the first of Weaver's career and the 17th blocked kick under head coach Andy McCollum. Middle Tennessee has now blocked seven field goals, including two this season (**Jeff Littlejohn** vs. North Texas).

DEFENSE CONTINUES STELLAR PLAY: The Blue Raider defense turned in another stellar effort, limiting Vanderbilt to 347 yards of total offense, more than 100 yards below their season average. The defense also allowed just one touchdown in the game, and have given up only 63 points in four contests this season (15.8 per game). The unit spent more than 19 minutes on the field in the first half and 35:28 overall in the game. **J.K. Sabb** led the charge with eight tackles, while **Jonathan Bonner** played perhaps his best game of the season, collecting seven stops, including three for loss.

GETTING OFF THE SCHNIDE: Middle Tennessee improved to 25-4 under Andy McCollum when leading at the half. The Blue Raiders also won for just the first time under McCollum when scoring less than 20 points, ending a streak of 25 straight defeats when scoring less than 20.

GROSS CLOSING IN ON TOP 10: RB **Eugene Gross** collected his second rushing touchdown of the season and the 19th of his career when he ran one in from eight yards out in the second quarter. Gross, a junior, now needs just one more rushing score to tie Kelverrick Green for 10th place all-time.

WILLIAMS BREAKS OUT: Freshman wide receiver **Bobby Williams** has shown improvement with each game and that trend continued against Vanderbilt. The Jacksonville, Fla., native hauled in a career-best five receptions for 80 yards to lead the Blue Raiders. Williams, who has increased his catch total with each game, snared a career-long 44-yarder in the second quarter, the longest play from scrimmage this season for the Blue Raiders.

SMITH GETS FG: Junior **Colby Smith** made his first field goal of the season and it came at a very good time for the Blue Raiders. After missing two field goals against North Texas, Smith nailed his first three-pointer of the season late in the fourth quarter from 29 yards out to put the Blue Raiders ahead, 17-15. It went down as the 16th made field goal of Smith's career, which ties him with Michael Robinson for ninth place on the all-time list.

SMITH DOES IT ALL: Junior **Colby Smith** took over the kickoff duties tonight and responded with a career-night, as well as changing the field constantly with his punting. Smith kicked off four times in the game, posting three touchbacks. Vanderbilt's average starting field position was the 19.25 yard line. In the punting department, Smith booted eight punts for a 44.4-yard average, including four downed inside the 20-yard line.

VANDY SUCCESS CONTINUES: For the third straight time, Middle Tennessee picked up its first victory of the season with a win over Vanderbilt. The two teams met in the season opener in 2001, and the Blue Raiders came into the game 0-5 in 2002 before picking up a 21-20 victory. Middle Tennessee improved to 3-12 all-time against the Commodores, including the current three-game winning streak.

MOSLEY GETS A SACK: Sophomore defensive end Eric Mosley recorded a sack in the fourth quarter, the fourth of his career and the fourth for the Blue Raiders this season. Mosley collected three sacks in 2004, tying for third on the team in that category.

BIG PLAYS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE: Big plays paid a big dividend for the Blue Raiders in the victory, with a pair more than 20 yards. Middle Tennessee came into the game with only seven plays longer than 20 yards this season and added two more to the ledger in the contest. **Bobby Williams'** 44-yard reception in the second quarter set up **Eugene Gross'** eight-yard touchdown run, and Gross' 22-yard shuffle pass reception was good for a first down on that same drive.

OFFENSE COMES THROUGH IN THE CLUTCH: The vaunted Middle Tennessee offense has been anything but this season, posting just 209 yards in the victory, the second lowest output of the season. But the squad took advantage of a short field for its first score, then drove 84 yards later in the second quarter for the second TD of the game. Trailing by a point in the fourth quarter, the unit put together a nine-play, 53-yard drive that culminated in the eventual game-winning points. **Colby Smith's** 29-yard field goal. The offense almost totaled its season output from the first three games in the contest, scoring 17 against Vanderbilt after netting only 21 combined versus Alabama, North Texas and Akron.

QUICK HITTERS: **Bobby Williams'** 44-yard reception in the second quarter was the longest of his career and was the longest pass completion by **Clint Marks** this season ... OL **Germayle Franklin** made his 21st consecutive start tonight against Vanderbilt and that is the longest streak on the team ... WR **Cleannord Saintil** has caught at least one pass in 15 straight games ... **Colby Smith's** third quarter punt of 52 yards equaled his long on the season ... Middle Tennessee improved to 5-3 under Andy McCollum after an open date and 5-1 against in-state schools ... ESPN2 broke in to cover the final minute of the contest, catching **Jeremiah Weaver's** game-saving blocked field goal.

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