

Gross Scores Four Times in 35-14 Victory

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FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. -

Eugene Gross rushed for 131 yards on a career-high 30 carries yards, scoring a career-high four touchdowns in Middle Tennessee's 35-14 victory over Florida Atlantic Saturday afternoon at Lockhart Stadium.

- **Video:** [Football Game Highlights](#)

Gross led a rushing attack that posted a season-high 263 yards, as the Middle Tennessee offense held on to the ball for 41:15 of the game. Ralph King added 97 yards on 22 carries, with the Blue Raiders attempting just 19 passes in the contest.

The Blue Raider defense was again stout, as it has been all season, holding FAU's offense to only 269 total yards, the fewest yards allowed this season by Middle Tennessee. The unit also picked off three passes and sack Owls quarterback Danny Embick four times, equaling the season total heading into the contest.

The Blue Raiders got on the board first after a change of possession by both teams in a span of two plays.

Middle Tennessee's Clint Marks threw an interception on the game's opening drive, but the Blue Raiders caught a break when the play was ruled down at the one yard line. Embick was picked off on the Owls first offensive play of the game by linebacker Dennis Burke, who returned his third career pick four yards to the two yard line.

Gross punched it in from the two on the first play for a 7-0 Middle Tennessee lead less than three minutes into the contest.

The Blue Raiders had two other chances to get on the board in the opening period, but Colby Smith's 47-yard field goal was wide right and his 38-yarder late in the quarter was blocked.

But Middle Tennessee put together a 10-play, 70-yard drive early in the second quarter, capped by a



19-yard TD run from King, his first career touchdown and the longest play from scrimmage for the redshirt junior.

The offense strung together a more impressive drive later in the quarter, 11 plays and 85 yards before Gross took a direct snap and rushed around the left side for five yards and a 21-0 Blue Raiders advantage.

But the homestanding Owls scored on the ensuing possession, with Charles Pierre 12-yard run cutting the Blue Raider lead to 21-7 at the half.

FAU scored again midway through the third quarter on Embick's one-yard run, making it a one-score game with 5:21 remaining.

Smith missed his third field goal of the game late in the third quarter, this one wide left from 46 yards.

The Middle Tennessee offense came to life again early in the fourth quarter, with Gross galloping 16 yards on one carry and Clint Marks scrambling nine yards for another first down. Gross capped the drive with another direct-snap run, again to the left side from 11 yards.

Keon Raymond's interception on the following FAU possession inside the 20-yard line. Gross punched this one in from a yard out for his career-high fourth TD run of the contest, becoming the 13th player in school history and the 10th player to rush for four touchdowns in one game.

POSTGAME NOTES
MIDDLE TENNESSEE AT FLORIDA ATLANTIC
OCT. 15, 2005; FT. LAUDERDALE, FL

BURKE GETS INT: On Middle Tennessee's first defensive play of the game, linebacker Dennis Burke got the Blue Raiders off to a good start by intercepting a Danny Embick pass inside the FAU 10-yard line to setup a two-yard TD run by Eugene Gross on the very next play. It was Burke's third career interception and the sixth of the season for the Blue Raiders. All three of Burke's interceptions have come against Sun Belt Conference opponents.

RUNNING GAME FINDS LIFE: Middle Tennessee entered play today with the worst rushing offense statistically in the Sun Belt Conference at 84.5 yards a game, but found new life against Florida Atlantic. The Blue Raiders rushed for a season-high 263 yards on 64 carries (second most carries ever in school history) and five touchdowns. That rushing total went down as the most by a Blue Raider team since recording 316 yards against Utah State on November 30, 2002 - a span of 28 games. Middle Tennessee's previous rushing high was 188 yards on 48 carries in a loss to North Texas back on Sept. 10. In the first half alone, Middle Tennessee rushed for 161 yards on 31 carries.

GROSS FOR 100: For the second time this season and the fifth time in his career, junior Eugene Gross topped the 100-yard rushing mark in today's game against Florida Atlantic. Gross carried a career-high times for 131 yards and scored a career-high four touchdowns. Three of his five 100-yard games have come on the road (Idaho - 2003, North Texas - 2004). The four TD's ties for the second most in school history with 13 others, including 10 players with four rushing scores.

GROSS IN TOP TEN: Junior running back Eugene Gross continues to have a nose for the endzone. With a career-best four rushing touchdowns in the win over FAU, Gross ran his career total to 23 rushing scores to surpass Kelverrick Green for 10th place on the all-time list and tie Ricky Martin for ninth place. Gross needs just one more rushing score to tie Mike Moore for eighth place.

KING OF A DAY: Junior Ralph King enjoyed his best game as a collegian on the road against Florida Atlantic. King rushed for a career-high 97 yards on 22 carries to go with his first career touchdown. King's second quarter score came from 19 yards out, the longest career play from scrimmage for the redshirt junior.

PICKIN' AND A GRINNIN': With three interceptions today against Florida Atlantic, Middle Tennessee ran its season total to eight, one more than the interception total the Blue Raiders had all of last season. Six of the interceptions have been by defensive backs and two by linebackers. Dennis Burke, Jonathan Bonner and Keon Raymond registered the three picks today.

SACK ATTACK: The Middle Tennessee defense was brilliant again in the win over FAU and did an excellent job of putting pressure on Owls quarterback Danny Embick. The Blue Raiders recorded four sacks to equal their season total coming into the game - one each by Quinton Staton, Jonathan Harris and Chance Dunleavy, and a half a sack for Devarick Scandrett and Jonathan Bonner. Middle Tennessee now has eight sacks on the season and Scandrett needs half a sack to move into a tie for fifth on the all-time list with Thomas Johnson (10, 2001-04).

QUICK HITTERS: Taron Henry returned his first career kickoff 41 yards to open the game, the longest kickoff return of the season for the Blue Raiders ... WR Linnie Yarbrough recorded his first career rush when he took a reverse in the first quarter for 14 yards ... Junior Walt Bell made his first collegiate start at wide receiver today, as did linebacker Chance Dunleavy ... The blocked field goal in the first quarter by FAU marked the first blocked field goal against Middle Tennessee since November 17, 2001, when Connecticut blocked a three-pointer ... WR Cleannord Saintil extended his streak to 16 straight games with at least one reception ... Middle Tennessee played a total of 55 players in the first half against FAU and 60 of the 66 players on the trip played in the game ... Jonathan Harris recorded his second career sack during the first possession of the second half ... FB Hunter Birtsch made his first career reception early in the third quarter that went for six yards and a first down ... LB Jonathan Bonner recorded his first collegiate interception in the fourth quarter in the win over FAU ... This marks the first time since 2001 that Middle Tennessee has recorded back-to-back road wins and the first time Middle Tennessee has won a league game on the road since November 20, 2003 at Arkansas State ... The Blue Raiders are now 3-0 in the I-A era coming off a victory over Vanderbilt.

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