Littlejohn named SBC Defensive Player of the Year

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Senior Jeff Littlejohn was tabbed the Sun Belt Conference Defensive Player of the Year and eight total players earned all-conference honors as announced by the league today. Middle Tennessee also had two players earn honorable mention honors.

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The league's coaches and selected media members honored junior Germayle Franklin, junior Eugene Gross, junior Willie Hall, Littlejohn, junior J.K. Sabb, senior Cleannord Saintil, junior Colby Smith, and senior Quinton Staton as all-league picks while sophomore Bradley Robinson and junior Clint Marks earned honorable mention honors.

Littlejohn and Saintil made first team, while Franklin, Gross, Hall, Sabb, Smith, and Staton were voted to the second team.

The eight players selected to the first and second teams are the most by the Blue Raiders since 11 were honored in 2001.

Littlejohn, who led a Blue Raider defense that turned in its best year in the I-A era, finished

with 34 tackles, 7.5 tackles for loss, two sacks, an interception, and a blocked field goal. However, what he did all year in clogging up the middle could not be displayed on the stat sheet. The Gaffney, S.C., native consistently faced double teams and made it extremely hard for the opposition to run on the Blue Raiders.

"This is a great honor and I am very appreciative of how the coaches and media viewed me as a player this year," Littlejohn said. "But this is a team game and I could not have received this award without the support and high level play of my teammates. Our entire defense stepped it up this year and I will always remember playing with this bunch. It was special."

Littlejohn becomes the first player of the year since Dwone Hicks and Wes Counts in 2001 and is the first defensive player of the year since Mike Caldwell in 1992.

"It all starts up front and Jeff Littlejohn was the anchor all year, along with Quinton (Staton)," said Head Coach Andy McCollum. "He disrupted offenses all year long just the way Brandon Kennedy did for North Texas a few years back. Jeff is a quality person and no one deserves this honor more."

The Blue Raiders' other first team pick was Saintil. The Naples, Fla., native enjoyed his best year as a Blue Raider by leading the league with 66 receptions for 884 yards and three touchdowns. Saintil, who ended his career with an eight-catch, 133-yard effort at FIU, goes down as the most productive two-year receiver in school history.

Franklin and Hall both were honored for the first time after enjoying a solid 2005 campaign. Both players led the team in snaps played and knockdowns.

Gross, the first running back honored at MT since Dwone Hicks in 2002, enjoyed his best all-around season by leading the Blue Raiders in rushing for the third straight season and pacing the league in scoring with 84 points. The Statesboro, Ga., native rushed for 724 yards and a career-best 13 touchdowns while leading all Sun Belt backs with 33 receptions.

Sabb, a junior college transfer, led the Blue Raider defense with 71 tackles including a team-best 13 tackles for loss. Sabb also added two sacks, an interception, and five pass breakups. Against North Texas, Sabb set a school record with five tackles for loss while collecting a career-high 10 stops at Troy including a key one on fourth down at the goal line late in the game.

Staton pulled off a rare feat by being honored for the second year in a row and on opposite sides of the ball. In 2004, Staton earned second team honors as an offensive lineman and this year he was picked as a defensive lineman. The Chattannooga native led all Blue Raider linemen and was second on the team with 53 tackles.

"This just shows you the versatility of Quinton," said McCollum. "He is a warrior on the football field and has one of the best motors I have ever coached. He will have a chance at the next level."

Smith, who earned second team honors in 2004 as a placekicker, was selected to the second team this year as a punter. The Franklin, Tenn., native enjoyed a career year by averaging 42.1 yards a punt and placing a personal-best 19 inside the opponent's 20-yard line.

Marks and Robinson were put on the honorable mention list and both had strong cases for all-league honors. Marks, who led the SBC in passing efficiency, became the first quarterback in school history to throw for more than 2,000 yards in back-to-back seasons while Robinson may have been the biggest surprise of players not being recognized. The sophomore shared the league lead with five interceptions and was second in the league in passes defended with 12. His five picks were the most by a Blue Raider since Cedric Stegall collected five in 1998.

PLAYER OF THE YEAR: Steven Jyles (Sr., QB, Louisiana-Monroe)

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: Steven Jyles (Sr., QB, Louisiana-Monroe)

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR: Jeff Littlejohn (Sr., DL, Middle Tennessee)

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR: Aaron Weathers (So., Safety, North Texas)

FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR: Tyrell Fenroy (Fr., RB, Louisiana-Lafayette)

COACH OF THE YEAR: Steve Roberts, Arkansas State

FIRST TEAM

OFFENSE			
QB	Steven Jyles	Sr.	Louisiana-Monroe
RB	Patrick Cobbs	Sr.	North Texas
RB	Antonio Warren	Sr.	Arkansas State
WR	Drouzon Quillen	Jr.	Louisiana-Monroe
WR	Cleannord Saintil	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
TE	Joey Trappey	Sr.	Louisiana-Monroe
OL	Victor Cernius	Jr.	Florida International
OL	Brandon Cox	Jr.	Louisiana-Lafayette
OL	Greg Hodges	Sr.	Louisiana-Lafayette
OL	Tanner Jenkins	Jr.	Arkansas State
OL	Dylan Lineberry	Jr.	North Texas
DEFENSE			
DL	Myron Anderson	Sr.	Arkansas State
DL	Antwan Barnes	Jr.	Florida International
DL	Brandon Guillory	Sr.	Louisiana-Monroe
DL	Jeff Littlejohn	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
LB	Keyonvis Bouie	Jr.	Florida International
LB	Bernard Davis	Sr.	Troy
LB	Shomari Earls	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
DB	Johnny Faulk	Sr.	Troy
DB	Willie Hughley	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
DB	Tyrell Johnson	So.	Arkansas State
DB	Chaz Williams	So.	Louisiana-Monroe
SPECIAL TEAMS			
PK	Eric Neihouse	Sr.	Arkansas State
P	Joel Stelly	Sr.	Louisiana-Monroe
Rt. Sp.	Leodis McKelvin	So.	Troy
A. Prp.	Michael Desormeaux	Fr.	Louisiana-Lafayette

SECOND TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	Josh Padrick	Jr.	Florida International
RB	Tyrell Fenroy	Fr.	Louisiana-Lafayette
RB	Eugene Gross	Jr.	Middle Tennessee
WR	Johnny Quinn	Sr.	North Texas
WR	Chandler Williams	Jr.	Florida International
TE	Samuel Smith	Jr.	Florida International
OL	Kyle Cunningham	So.	Louisiana-Monroe
OL	Willie Hall	Jr.	Middle Tennessee
OL	Germayle Franklin	Jr.	Middle Tennessee
OL	Matt Mandich	Fr.	Arkansas State
OL	Jesse Newman	So.	Louisiana-Lafayette

DEFENSE

DL	Jeremiah Chapman	So.	North Texas
DL	Torre Lankford	Sr.	Troy
DL	Eugene Kwarteng	Sr.	Louisiana-Lafayette
DL	Quinton Staton	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
LB	Phillip Graves	Jr.	North Texas
LB	J.K. Sabb	Jr.	Middle Tennessee
LB	Devrett Wade	Jr.	Arkansas State
DB	James Johnson	Sr.	Arkansas State
DB	Kevin Payne	Jr.	Louisiana-Monroe
DB	Nick Turnbull	Sr.	Florida International
DB	Aaron Weathers	So.	North Texas

SPECIAL TEAMS

PK	Adam Moss	Sr.	Florida International
P	Colby Smith	Jr.	Middle Tennessee
Rt. Sp.	James Johnson	Sr.	Arkansas State
A. Prp.	Gary Banks	So.	Troy

HONORABLE MENTION

QB	Nick Noce	Sr.	Arkansas State
QB	Danny Embick	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
QB	Clint Marks	Jr.	Middle Tennessee
WR	Cory McKinney	Sr.	Florida International
OL	Jarrid Smith	So.	Florida Atlantic
OL	Adam Hill	So.	Louisiana-Monroe
DE	Anthony Hills	Jr.	Louisiana-Lafayette
LB	Jason Schule	Sr.	Louisiana-Monroe
LB	Maurice Holman	So.	North Texas
LB	Leverne Johnson	Sr.	Troy
DB	Khayyam Burns	So.	Arkansas State
DB	Michael Adams	Jr.	Louisiana-Lafayette
DB	Bradley Robinson	So.	Middle Tennessee
PK	Nick Bazaldua	Sr.	North Texas
P	Thomas Olmsted	Sr.	Troy