

September 2, 2010

Late score pushes Gophers past Blue Raiders

First home game of 2010 season on national TV

Athletic Communications

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee scored 17 unanswered points to take its first lead but a late score by Minnesota broke the tie and gave the Gophers a 24-17 victory in Thursday's season opener for both schools in front of the fourth-largest crowd of 25,908 fans at Floyd Stadium in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The Blue Raiders played host to their first Big Ten opponent in school history live on ESPNU as they kicked off the 75th season at Floyd Stadium.

Minnesota drove the length of the field on its initial possession, taking the ball 79 yards on 11 plays, before handing off to Jon Hoese for the 1-yard plunge at 8:43 for a 7-0 lead in the opening period. The Golden Gophers attempted only one pass during the drive, which became a no-play, following a pass interference call on the Blue Raiders and keeping the ball in the hands of the visitors inside the 5-yard line.

Duane Bennett was the main force in the backfield, racking up six carries for 59 yards. He had rushes for 32 and 25 yards on the first and third plays, respectively, of the season-opening possession.

Middle Tennessee (0-1), on its first drive, was stopped just inches short on a third-down play in which starting quarterback [Logan Kilgore](#) rushed for 10 yards. After the official's measurement showed the Blue Raiders were not quite to the first down marker, [Nathaniel Toulson](#) boomed a 53-yard punt backing the Gophers up to deep in their own end.

The Golden Gophers secured the first turnover of the game when Mike Rallis intercepted Kilgore at 4:13 of the first quarter near the midfield stripe on a pass that went slipped through the hands of [Garrett Andrews](#). Rallis returned the pick to the MT 43, but the Middle Tennessee defensive 11 held strong and forced the visitors to punt. Neither team would score again before the quarter ended and Minnesota (1-0) held the one-touchdown edge after 15 minutes.

Again, the Gophers kept the drive alive with a penalty down near the goal line. Minnesota started on its own 36 with 1:58 left in the first quarter and then used the opening 1:12 of the second, capitalizing on another pass interference call against the Blue Raider secondary, to hand the ball off to Hoese for a 2-yard dart up the middle for a 14-0 advantage with 13:48 remaining in the half. The 64-yard drive lasted just seven plays, the largest of which was the opening pass play, a 24-yard strike from Adam Weber to Eric Lair to cross midfield.

Another Middle Tennessee drive fizzled out, giving the ball back to Minnesota on another [Josh Davis](#) punt. The Golden Gophers would march down the field to the MT 15; however, following a Weber fumbled snap, [Emmanuel Perez](#) crashed the backfield on the next play and sacked Weber for a six-yard loss. Minnesota then lined up for a 39-yard field goal attempt by Eric Ellestad, but the kick missed and the score remained 14-0 with 6:49 to play in the second quarter.

The Blue Raiders would take advantage of the missed try, driving straight down the field over the next 1:52 and closed the gap to seven, 14-7, on a seven-yard carry by [Phillip Tanner](#) at 4:57. Middle Tennessee covered the 78 necessary yards on just eight plays as Kilgore 3-of-3 for 54 yards, including a 32-yarder to [Malcolm Beyah](#), who was wide open between the hashes, to set up the score.

The Gophers looked as if they were going to score once again before the break, ignited by a 47-yard return by Troy Stoudermire on the ensuing kickoff. The possession would reach the Blue Raider 23 a couple plays after [Gorby Loreus](#) and [Antwan Davis](#) combined on the second sack of the game. Lined up at the 23 for a 40-yard field goal attempt, Ellestad again was negated on his kick attempt and Middle Tennessee stayed alive.

Kilgore, playing the poise of a veteran in his first start in blue, quickly took his team down the field and used just 44 seconds after starting at his own 23 on five plays to pull the Blue Raiders even at 14-14. He located Beyah for 28 yards, threading the needle across the middle. After a tipped pass intended for [Garrett Andrews](#), Kilgore hit on his next two throws, including a 22-yard scoring drive to [Sancho McDonald](#) down the left flank for the tying points with just 36 seconds left in the half. [Benjamin Cunningham](#) also



Antwan Davis led the Blue Raiders with 12 tackles, including a half-sack, in Thursday's season opener versus Minnesota. (Bradley Lambert)

took a direct snap on a play, carrying for 18 yards to keep the drive alive and lifting the Middle Tennessee momentum to a game-high to that point.

Tanner keyed MT's opening drive of the second half, breaking free for a 51-yard dash to the Gopher 17, only to be caught from behind by Keanon Cooper. The Minnesota defense would stand tall, allowing only three more yards and forcing a 31-yard field goal by [Alan Gendreau](#). The attempt split the uprights and the Blue Raiders garnered their first lead, 17-14, with 12:44 on the third quarter clock.

The two teams would trade drives throughout the period before Middle Tennessee pinned the Gophers down to their own 1-yard line on a punt downed by Beyah. Minnesota, however, did not let the field position affect its attack. Methodically, the Golden Gophers marched down the field and ran the clock out of the third quarter.

As the final frame began, Minnesota was deep in Blue Raider territory and looking for a way to cross into pay dirt and take the lead. The Gophers would reach the 2-yard line before Middle Tennessee's defense stiffened and forced another field goal. This time, the trey was good, from 20 yards out and the game became tied for the second time, 17-17, at 14:11 of the fourth quarter, capping the 13-play, 97-yard drive.

Hoese tallied his third touchdown of the night, another 1-yarder, to give Minnesota a 24-17 lead at 3:09. His score ended an extended drive, covering 77 yards on 16 plays and elapsing 9:10. Thirteen of the 16 plays were carries, allowing UM to wind the clock down. Weber was successful on his three passing attempts for 21 yards.

Beyah returned the next kickoff to the MT 28, but as he was being tackled, the ball came loose and the Gophers' Hoese pounced on it for the turnover. Fortunately for Middle Tennessee, the miscue was not converted into more points and the final margin stayed at seven.

Minnesota used a 3-to-1 ratio on the time of possession, holding the ball 45:34 to the Blue Raiders' 14:26, which included 281 yards on the ground. The final offensive yardage was a bit closer, as the Gophers led by just over a hundred, 431 to 318.

Kilgore finished his first MT game with 172 yards on 13-of-18 with one score. He hit Andrews for a team-high four catches and 33 yards, while Beyah grabbed three catches for a team-best 65 yards. Seven different Middle Tennessee receivers had receptions.

Tanner was the leading ground gainer with 75 yards, while [D.D. Kyles](#) added 32 and Cunningham chipped in 31.

Bennett churned out 187 yards for the Gophers on 30 carries, outgaining the entire Blue Raider backfield by himself. Weber tossed 10-of-17 for 150 yards, hitting six different teammates. Lair led the team in receiving yardage with 40 on just two receptions.

[Antwan Davis](#) paced the Blue Raider defense with 12 tackles, including seven solo stops. He was joined in double figures by [Justin Jones](#), who contributed 10 tackles. [Jamari Lattimore](#) was credited with the team's lone quarterback hurry.

Rallis topped the Minnesota defense with seven tackles, while Cooper and Ryan Collado each recorded six stops.

Middle Tennessee will return to action at 6 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 11 when it plays host to Austin Peay in the second-straight home game to open the campaign. The game will be Hall of Fame Night, as the Blue Raiders induct five new members to the prestigious club.

Middle Tennessee Notes:

TANNER CLOSING IN ON TOP 10:

RB [Phillip Tanner](#) scored the Blue Raiders' first touchdown of the 2010 season when he ran in from seven yards out from a "Wildcat" position. It marked Tanner's 21st rushing touchdown of his career and inches him closer to the Blue Raiders' top ten list. Tanner needs two more rushing scores to tie Ricky Martin for 10th place. It was also Tanner's 23rd career touchdown and he needs just one more score of any kind to tie Kerry Wright and Ricky Martin for 10th place on the all-time touchdowns scored list.

KILGORE STRONG DEBUT:

Sophomore quarterback [Logan Kilgore](#) made his first career start on national television against Minnesota and turned in a strong effort. Kilgore completed 13 of 18 passes for 172 yards and a touchdown. After the Blue Raiders fell behind 14-0, Kilgore engineered a comeback that saw MT score 17 unanswered points.

FIRST TIME STARTERS:

Middle Tennessee had six players make their first career starts on Thursday night against Minnesota. CB [Arness Ikner](#), QB [Logan Kilgore](#), OL [Preston Bailey](#), DT [Gary Tucker](#), WR [Jared Bamber](#), and LB [Justin Jones](#) all made the starting rotation in the season opener.

NATIONAL EXPOSURE:

Tonight's game was the 11th nationally televised game for the Blue Raiders under Rick Stockstill which is the most by any team in

the Sun Belt Conference during that span. It marked the 13th national broadcast in school history.

STREAK ENDS AT 7:

Middle Tennessee saw its seven-game winning streak come to an end tonight against Minnesota. The Blue Raiders' streak was the third longest in the country entering tonight's play.

4TH LARGEST CROWD:

Middle Tennessee announced a crowd of 25,908 on Thursday and that goes down as the fourth largest in school history. The largest crowd in stadium history happened last year against Memphis when 28,105 saw the Blue Raiders take down the Tigers. Three of the top five crowds in school history has happened under head coach Rick Stockstill.

QUICK HITTERS:

WR [Sancho McDonald](#) reeled in his sixth career touchdown pass late in the second quarter ... PK [Alan Gendreau](#) made his 29th career field goal early in the third quarter and needs one more to tie Colby Smith for sixth place on the all-time list ... WR [Richard Drake](#) made his first career reception late in the third quarter ... OL [Mark Fisher](#) made his team-high 36th career start and played in his 38th career game ... MT is now 1-3 under Stockstill when tied at the half and dropped to 1-2 when tied after the third quarter ... P [Nathaniel Toulson](#) launched three kicks for 133 yards, a 44.3 average, with a long of 53. He had one kick downed at the 1-yard line by [Malcolm Beyah](#).

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