

Offensive totals carry Blue Raiders to victory over Gavs

Middle Tennessee picks up first season win

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Senior running back Phillip Tanner scored three times, as Middle Tennessee built an early sizeable lead and withstood an Austin Peay comeback attempt in a 56-33 victory Saturday night in front of 16,806 at Floyd Stadium in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The Blue Raider record-setting triumph came on Hall of Fame Day and in the first meeting between the two schools since 1997.

Middle Tennessee set a school record with 97 offensive plays, amassing 654 yards from scrimmage for the third-highest total in program history. Seven of the eight touchdowns came on the ground, setting a program high in the Rick Stockstill era (2006-present).

The Blue Raiders methodically moved down the field on their first possession, using 13 plays covering 78 yards. Sophomore Jeff Murphy, in his first career start, connected on a 23-yard pass to the far sideline to Garrett Andrews. It was one of three completions among five attempts for the signal caller during the drive, which Tanner capped off with a rush from less than a yard away to put Middle Tennessee (1-1) ahead, 7-0, at 11:52.

Just 50 seconds later, at 11:02, Darin Davis intercepted Jake Ryan's first pass and raced untouched 38 yards down the home sideline to put the Blue Raiders on top, 14-0. Davis' pick was his first of his career, while he also scored for the first time at MT.



Davis would appear to grab his second pick exactly four minutes later after the ball popped free on an apparent completion to Devin Stark; however, the play was nullified after Middle Tennessee was whistled for a neutral zone offside infraction, giving the ball back to the Governors. With the drive continuing, Austin Peay (1-1) put its first dent on the scoreboard six plays later, at 5:08, when Stephen Stansell converted a 28-yard field goal to end a 14-play, 59-yard possession, which lasted 5:54, and pull it within 14-3.

Alan Gendreau attempted to get the three points back for the Blue Raiders, but his 41-yard kick was pushed just wide to the left with 24 seconds remaining in the opening period. The Middle Tennessee defense stood tall, stopping the Govs on a fourth-and-short, giving it the ball back at 13:38 of the second quarter.

The Blue Raiders wasted no time once again adding points to pad their lead, reaching pay dirt in just five plays as Murphy carried the ball across the plane from 11 yards out for a 21-3 advantage at 11:18 for his first career score.

Middle Tennessee continued to pour in points during the first half, tacking on another touchdown at 7:49 when Tanner high-stepped his way through the hash marks from three yards to cap a nine-play, 54-yard drive encompassing 2:11 and giving the Blue Raiders a 28-3 edge.

Austin Peay clawed its way back at 5:11 when Stark caught a 28-yard pass in the back of the endzone from Ryan, ending a six-play, 65-yard drive covering just 2:38, to make it 28-10. Ryan was 3-of-4 for 50 yards during the possession.

The score would quickly be countered as Middle Tennessee marched down the field, covering 68 yards in just eight plays to increase the margin back to 25, 35-10, with 2:47 left in the second quarter. Sophomore Benjamin Cunningham darted in from the 5-yard line, outstretching the ball over the line for the score. He was credited with the last 11 yards, and 27 total, on the drive.

The Governors had two more chances to net more points before the break. Their first drive reached the MT 19, but a holding call moved them back out of touchdown range. Stansell then missed a 46-yard field goal attempt with 34 seconds to play.

The Blue Raiders gambled offensively, resulting in Sheldon Wade intercepting a Murphy toss at midfield. Austin Peay made the most of its opportunity with Ryan finding Adrian Mines for a 19-yard strike in the front corner of the endzone with three seconds remaining to pull within 18, 35-17, entering halftime.

The halftime break did not stop the Governor momentum and the deficit was trimmed to 15, 35-20, on the first possession of the third quarter on a 20-yard field goal by Stansell at 9:21. Austin Peay went 67 yards in 13 plays to start the half, although its drive was halted at the 1-yard line before the trey split the uprights.

Eric Russell bolted down the visitor sideline on the ensuing kickoff, finding a clear path for 41 yards, to provide the Middle Tennessee offense with solid field possession. However, the Blue Raiders were unable to advance the ball very far and Tanner was stopped on a fourth-and-long one situation, giving Austin Peay the ball back at its own 40.

Ryan White took the first handoff and dashed 55 yards until being caught from behind at the MT 5-

yard line. Terrence Holt, the preseason Ohio Valley Player of the Year, then went the five yards on the next play to pull the Govs within one score, 35-27, at 6:55 of the third quarter. The two-play drive lasted just 37 seconds.

The Blue Raiders turned the next possession into their first touchdown of the second half. Murphy dropped a lob pass into the outstretched hands of Andrews at the 1-yard line, a play that would be reviewed, for the highlight of the drive. Tanner then finished off the possession with his third score of the game at 4:32 to extend the lead back to 15, 42-27. Middle Tennessee went 75 yards in 10 plays, covering 2:23 off the clock.

Austin Peay became opportunistic once again. After punting the ball away, the Governors regained possession on the first play of the Blue Raiders' next drive when Murphy fumbled. Jeremy Ross scooped up the loose ball and went 16 yards for the next APSU touchdown, at 2:51. However, a bad snap on the point after try cut the gap to just nine, 42-33.

Middle Tennessee crossed the midfield stripe in its next attempt to get back some points. Murphy kept the ball on the drive's fifth play but it was knocked loose, returning it to the Govs at their own 46. Fortunately for the Blue Raiders, their defense prevented another score before the third quarter expired and held the nine-point margin entering the final 15 minutes.

Tanner sprinted 56 yards on the fourth quarter's first play to top the 100-yard barrier, his third career contest in triple digits and first since a career-best 159 against North Texas in 2008. The drive stalled, but Nathaniel Toulson's punt would be downed inside the 1-yard line.

Four plays later, Austin Peay returned the ball to the Blue Raiders. Middle Tennessee struck quickly, with Murphy starting off with a 30-yard pass to Andrews. Then, D.D. Kyles crossed into the endzone for his first score of the campaign with a three-yard carry at 12:08 to extend the lead to 16, 49-33.

Rod Isaac thwarted any Governor threat on their next possession, intercepting Ryan's pass at the MT 39. Middle Tennessee started to drive down the field with Murphy finding Tyler Mason for a 30-yard reception, but Mason coughed the ball up and giving Austin Peay another chance.

The Blue Raiders forced a three-and-out, and after Ryan Key boomed a 70-yard punt, the hosts began their next drive at the 4-yard line. Just like it had numerous times, Middle Tennessee ate up clock, covering the next 3:31, before Kyles found pay dirt for the second time on a seven-yard rush up the middle at 5:52 to increase the score to 56-33. Kyles had four carries for 43 yards, while Murphy was perfect on three attempts during the possession.

Neither team mustered much of an offensive scoring threat the remainder of the game, as the Blue Raiders evened their season record.

Murphy finished with 301 yards on 23-of-36 passing, finding Andrews a team-high tying four times for 97 yards. Sancho McDonald added four receptions, as nine different Middle Tennessee players grabbed at least one catch.

Tanner crossed the 100-yard plateau for the third time in his career, and first since 2008 against North Texas. He ended the game with 127 yards, while Cunningham contributed 86, Kyles chipped in 76 and Murphy tallied 59 on the way to the Blue Raiders totaling 353 on the day.

White finished with 92 yards on the ground for the Governors. Ryan completed 16 of 40 passes for 224 yards and two touchdowns.

Middle Tennessee will return to action at 6 p.m. Saturday Sept. 18 at Memphis. The Blue Raiders knocked off the Tigers 31-14 in last year's home opener.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:

TANNER IN TOP 10:

RB Phillip Tanner scored three rushing touchdowns against Austin Peay to give him 24 for his career, which ties him with Mike Moore for 9th on the all-time list. Tanner, who has scored the Blue Raiders' first touchdown in both games this season, now has 26 career touchdowns scored of any kind which ties him with Dwight Stone for eighth on the all-time touchdowns scored list. For his career, Tanner has also scored one touchdown on a reception and another on a kickoff return.

MT STRONG VS IN-STATE:

Since Middle Tennessee joined the FBS ranks in 1999, the Blue Raiders own a mark of 9-1 against teams from the state of Tennessee. The lone loss came at No. 4 Tennessee in 2002, 26-3. Under Rick Stockstill, the Blue Raiders are now a perfect 4-0 against in-state foes.

MURPHY GETS FIRST START:

Junior quarterback Jeff Murphy, who arrived on campus in July, made his first collegiate start under center for the Blue Raiders in the win over Austin Peay. Murphy got the nod due to a foot injury to last week's starter Logan Kilgore. Murphy completed 23 of 36 passes for 301 yards with one interception and scored his first collegiate touchdown on an 11-yard run in the second quarter.

DAVIS FIRST PICK/TD:

Junior linebacker Darin Davis (Ft. Lauderdale, FL) registered his first career interception when he stepped in front of an APSU pass on the Governors opening possession. Davis returned his first pick 38 yards for a touchdown for the Blue Raiders' first pick for a score since Jeremy Kellem brought one back against ULM 58 yards on Nov. 28, 2009. It was also the 10th defensive touchdown under Rick Stockstill.

CAREER-HIGH FOR BENNY:

Sophomore running back Benny Cunningham turned in a career game against Austin Peay Saturday night. The Nashville, TN, native rushed for a personal-best 86 yards on a career-high 14 carries and scored his third career rushing touchdown on a five-yard run in the second quarter. Cunningham's previous rushing high was 59 yards against FIU in 2009.

30 IS FINE:

Under Rick Stockstill, the Blue Raiders are virtually a lock for victory if they put up 30 points or more. MT is now 20-1 under Stockstill when scoring 30 points, including a perfect 9-0 mark in 2009. The lone loss came at Louisville in 2007 when the Blue Raiders fell, 58-52.

TANNER TOPS 100:

Phillip Tanner notched his third career 100-yard rushing game when he tallied 127 yards on 18 carries in the win over Austin Peay. Tanner, who also added three touchdowns, last topped the century mark against North Texas on Nov. 22, 2008. It is also the 10th time under Rick Stockstill a player has topped 100 yards and the Blue Raiders are now 9-1 in those games.

MURPHY REACHES 300:

Quarterback Jeff Murphy passed for 301 yards in his Blue Raider debut, becoming just the third signal caller under Rick Stockstill to reach the mark. The feat has been accomplished five times overall, with Joe Craddock and Dwight Dasher each surpassing the plateau two times. Craddock's 401 yards against ULM in 2007 rank as the highest under Stockstill.

DEBUT WIN:

Jeff Murphy became the first Blue Raider quarterback to earn a victory in his starting debut since redshirt freshman Clint Marks led Middle Tennessee to a 35-18 win against New Mexico State at home Oct. 11, 2003.

BIG OFFENSIVE NIGHT:

Middle Tennessee enjoyed a big offensive night against Austin Peay with 654 total yards and 56 points on 97 plays. The 654 yards rank as the third most in school history, while the 97 plays set a new school record eclipsing the old standard by two, set Oct. 10, 1987, against Mississippi Valley. The 56 points went down as the second-most under Rick Stockstill.

RUSHING FOR SCORES:

The Blue Raiders set a Rick Stockstill-era record with seven touchdowns on the ground in tonight's game. The mark ties for fourth overall in school history, matching the effort set against Connecticut Nov. 4, 2000, and is one shy of the school mark.

QUICK HITTERS:

OL Mark Fisher made his team-high 37th career start and played in his 39th career game ... Walk-on kicker John Gentry had his first career kickoffs tonight against APSU ... MT went to 8-0 under Rick Stockstill when wearing its blue on white uniforms ... Eric Russell had his first collegiate kickoff return against APSU and it went for 41 yards ... D.D. Kyles scored his fourth and fifth career rushing touchdowns against APSU on Saturday and the first of the 2010 season ... CB Rod Issac recorded his third career interception in the fourth quarter and his first since getting one against WKU in 2008 ... RB William Pratcher received his first career rushing attempts late in the game against APSU ... MT's 353 team rushing yards are the fifth most in school history.

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