Second half shutout locks Sun Belt-opening win for Blue Raiders

Middle Tennessee pulls away from close halftime score

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LAFAYETTE, La. - Middle Tennessee opened up a close game in the second half with a pair of big-yardage touchdowns in the third quarter to begin Sun Belt play with a 34-14 victory at Louisiana-Lafayette Saturday night at Cajun Field in Lafayette, La., in front of 17,249 fans. The Blue Raiders held just a six-point lead at the halftime break, but two long plays and an increased effort on defense ignited the runaway triumph.

Logan Kilgore had a career night, completing 21-of-36 for 207 yards, all career highs, while the team combined for 34 carries and 217 yards on the ground. Phillip Tanner was the leading ground gainer, finishing with 104 yards on 17 attempts, while D.D. Kyles chipped in 84 yards on just five carries.

Alan Gendreau gave the Blue Raiders the early lead, 3-0, on a 40-yard strike from the left hash mark following a Cajun turnover. Louisiana's first play, a completion from Chris Masson to Javone Lawson across the middle, was broken up when Rod Issac forced a fumble at the MT 35. Derrick Crumpton returned the loose ball 31 yards into Louisiana-Lafayette territory, setting up the Middle Tennessee scoring drive of six plays, 14 yards, at the 12:39 mark of the first quarter.

Louisiana-Lafayette drove down the field on its next possession, keeping the drive alive on a pair of

third-and-long conversions. The Ragin' Cajuns' then lined up to even the score, a 41-yard try at 3:41 of the opening 15 minutes, but Issac was able to get a hand on Tyler Albrecht's attempt to maintain the slim Middle Tennessee (2-2, 1-0 Sun Belt) edge.

The Blue Raiders' drive, which started in the first quarter, ended at 13:22 of the second when Kyles shook off a Louisiana-Lafayette defender on an 8-yard sprint to the left front corner to increase the lead to 10-0. The possession, covering 76 yards in 14 plays and taking 5:19 off the clock, featured two penalties for a loss of 20 yards called against Middle Tennessee, forcing it to find ways to dig out of long-yardage situations.

The Ragin' Cajuns responded by using their next drive to cut the deficit to three, 10-7, when Masson capped a long possession found Ladarius Green in the back of the endzone on a 3-yard toss. Running back Kevis Streeter gained 29 yards on four carries, as Louisiana-Lafayette (1-2, 1-1 Sun Belt) spent 4:08 to cover 70 yards in 10 plays.

Tanner and the Blue Raiders wasted no time in answering the score. He dashed 26 yards, virtually untouched, to put Middle Tennessee back on top by 10, 17-7, at 8:27 of the first half. It took the Blue Raiders just four plays to go 60 yards after receiving solid field possession when the Cajuns' kickoff went out of bounds, allowing MT to start at its own 40. Tanner gained 37 yards on two rushes during the drive, while quarterback Logan Kilgore was 2-of-2 for the remaining 23 yards, finding Harold Turner for 11 yards on the first play before connecting with Benjamin Cunningham two plays later.

Middle Tennessee forced Louisiana-Lafayette to punt on its next possession, but three plays into the Blue Raiders' drive, Kilgore was intercepted by Dwight Bentley, turning the ball back over to the home team with just 31 yards to go. The Ragin' Cajuns took advantage of the miscue, marching down the field in just six plays, covering 2:10, when Blaine Gautier found pay dirt in a Wildcat formation rush to cut the margin back down to three, 17-14, with 3:04 left in the half.

Gendreau padded the lead with the second longest field goal in Sun Belt and school history by nailing a 55-yard field goal at 1:07 of the second quarter to give Middle Tennessee a 20-14 halftime lead. The Blue Raiders went 27 yards in 10 plays, elapsing 1:57 off the clock, on the final scoring drive of the half, again utilizing the ground attack for 23 yards.

It took until the fourth overall possession of the second half, the Blue Raiders' second drive, for another score to be added to the board. Facing a third-and-10 from its own 38, Middle Tennessee struck again when Kilgore found Malcolm Beyah streaking down the right sideline. Beyah, with outstretched arms, reeled in the pass and beat his coverage for the career-long 62-yard touchdown and giving MT a 27-14 lead with 10:02 remaining in the third quarter.

Neither team would score again until Kyles took a pitch from Kilgore and outraced the Louisiana defense down the Cajun sideline for 74 yards to increase the margin to 20, 34-14, with just 1:02 to play in the next-to-last frame. He went around the left end and brushed off a couple would-be tacklers before crossing the goal line.

The Blue Raiders will return to action when they play host to Troy at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 5 live on ESPN2.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:

MOST WINS IN SBC:
Middle Tennessee's win over Louisiana on Saturday night was its 39th Sun Belt Conference victory which leads the league in its 10th year. The Blue Raiders are now 39-25 all-time in league play.

KILGORE HAS CAREER NIGHT:
Quarterback Logan Kilgore rebounded from a three interception game against Memphis to set personal highs in passing yards, completions, and attempts against Louisiana. Kilgore completed 21 of 36 passes for 207 yards to go with a career long 62-yard TD strike to Malcolm Beyah. Kilgore is the fifth different signal-caller under Rick Stockstill to throw for more than 200 yards in a game.

QUICK STRIKE RAIDERS:
Middle Tennessee put together six scoring drives against Louisiana and five of them were less than two minutes in possession time. In fact, three of the six scores actually occurred in less than one minute against the Ragin' Cajuns. For the year, the Blue Raiders have scored 20 times and 10 of those have been less than two minutes in possession time.

GENDREAU GOES DEEP:
Junior Alan Gendreau nailed a career long 55-yard field goal in the final minute of the first half to give MT a 20-14 halftime advantage over UL. The 55-yard kick was the second longest in school history and the second longest in 10 years of the Sun Belt Conference. The Middle Tennessee record is held by Kelly Potter who hit a 57-yarder against Tennessee Tech in 1982 and the conference record is owned by North Texas' Jason Ball who hit a 57-yarder in 2001 against Arkansas State.

TANNER GETS 25TH:
Senior Phillip Tanner recorded his 25th career rushing touchdown when he went 26 yards for a score in the second quarter against Louisiana. Tanner ranks ninth all-time in rushing scores at MT and needs one more to move into a tie for seventh. Tanner has a team-leading five rushing TDs this season.

TANNER TOPS CENTURY MARK:
Tanner climbed over the 100-yard mark for the second time this season and fourth in his career with his 104 yards tonight against the Ragin' Cajuns. Middle Tennessee is now 135-48-1 when an individual rushes for at least 100 yards, while under head coach Rick Stockstill, the Blue Raiders improve to 10-1.

ISSAC GETS FIRST BLOCK:
Senior Rod Issac recorded his first career block when he rejected a ULL 41-yard field goal attempt in the first quarter. It was the first block for the Blue Raiders this season and the 15th overall block under Rick Stockstill. Under Stockstill, the Blue Raiders now have eight blocked field goals, six punts, and one PAT.

LATTIMORE TIES RECORD; MOVES UP LIST:
Senior Jamari Lattimore surpassed the school record, and tying the Sun Belt mark with five other players, with four quarterback sacks in the win over Louisiana. Lattimore had three sacks in a game last year at Maryland and Anthony Hicks had three sacks against UT-Martin in 1996. The four sacks run Lattimore's career total to 14 which moved him past Danny Carmichael and into a third-place tie with Tavares Jones on the all-time sack list. Lattimore, who has a team-leading five sacks this season, needs one more to tie Anthony McCord for second and 10 more to tie Erik Walden for first.

GENDREAU MOVES INTO TOP 10:
PK Alan Gendreau moved into the Top 10 on Middle Tennessee's all-time scoring list with 10 points against ULL on Saturday. Gendreau moved past Bobby Young for ninth place and now has 194 career points.

LONG DISTANCE FOR BEYAH-KILGORE:
QB Logan Kilgore and WR Malcolm Beyah both recorded career longs when they hooked up for a touchdown in the third quarter against Louisiana. Kilgore hit a streaking Beyah down the right side line for a 62-yard scoring pass that was both players' career long play.

QUICK HITTERS:
With Mark Fisher missing today's game with an injury, Jeremy Kellem and Mike Williams now share the team lead for the most consecutive starts at 29 ... Middle Tennessee lost the opening coin toss for the fourth straight time this season ... WR Tavarres Jefferson made his first reception of the season on the Blue Raiders' opening drive ... DE Jarrett Crittenton and OT Jadareius Hamlin made their first career starts tonight ... WR Andrew Banks made his first reception of the season in the second quarter ... D.D. Kyles' second quarter TD run was the third of the season and the sixth for his career ... MT is now 21-3 when leading at the half under Rick Stockstill ...MT is now 21-1 under Stockstill when scoring more than 30 points ... MT is 5-5 in SBC openers ... Rick Stockstill is now 10-6 in road SBC games.

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