Turnovers cost Blue Raiders chances at Georgia Tech

Dasher scores both Middle Tennessee touchdowns

October 16, 2010 · Athletic Communications

ATLANTA - A one-score game at the half turned into a runaway victory for host Georgia Tech, as Middle Tennessee could not overcome a season-high six turnovers in falling 42-14 Saturday afternoon in front of 40,652 at Bobby Dodd Stadium in Atlanta. The six turnovers, including four interceptions, are the most by a Blue Raider squad under head coach Rick Stockstill.

Senior safety Jeremy Kellem led the Middle Tennessee defense with a career-high 13 tackles, while Antwan Davis added eight tackles. Justin Jones was credited with the Blue Raiders' lone sack, a two-yard behind the line of scrimmage stop, among his two total tackles for loss.

Quarterback Dwight Dasher finished 20-of-35 for 173 yards. Phillip Tanner paced the ground attack with 56 yards on 13 carries.

The Atlantic Coast Conference's leading rusher, Georgia Tech quarterback Joshua Nesbitt, led all players with 106 yards on 22 carries engineering the triple-option offense. He managed just 86 yards through the air, completing 5-of-13 attempts.

Middle Tennessee received the opening kickoff and showed signs of life early against the defending ACC champions. The Blue Raiders converted a pair of third-and-long situations during their first

drive, but Dasher was intercepted by Jerrad Tarrant on the possession's ninth play. Tarrant returned the pick 30 yards to the MT 34, giving the Jackets a short field with which to work.

Georgia Tech converted the turnover into the game's first score at 10:34, as Orwin Smith capped off a three-play, 34-yard drive with a 20-yard sprint around the left end to give the Yellow Jackets a 7-0 lead.

After MT was stopped on its next drive, the Derrek Upshaw forced an Anthony Allen fumble on the Blue Raiders' 46, returning the ball to the offense with 5:19 remaining in the first quarter after Marquise Dixon pounced on it for the recovery.

Middle Tennessee (2-4) would quickly move down the field, covering 41 yards in nine plays, but again Dasher was intercepted, as Julian Burnett stepped in front of his pass at the GT four-yard line for the second Blue Raider turnover of the opening 15 minutes.

Nesbitt went 36 yards on the drive's second play to cross midfield as the first quarter came to a close. However, the Middle Tennessee defense held firm and halted the possession on a fourth-and-three situation three plays later.

After the Blue Raiders used their first timeout of the half, Tarrant corralled another Dasher pass for the third turnover of the game. Tarrant returned the ball 30 yards to set Georgia Tech (5-2) up at the MT 27. The short field, however, was not used to the Jackets' advantage and they settled for a 41-yard field goal attempt by Scott Blair. The Blue Raiders kick defense forced Blair to push the attempt wide left, his first miss of the season.

The Yellow Jackets would not miss scoring on their next opportunity. A Nesbitt keeper from a yard away at 7:11 of the second quarter ended a sustained, nine-play, 76-yard drive covering 3:33 to increase the margin to 14-0. Georgia Tech began the possession on a 41-yard toss from Nesbitt to a wide-open Smith, but Nesbitt's 10-yard carry three plays later would be the next-longest play on the drive.

Middle Tennessee answered immediately and responded quickly, in just under three minutes, when Dasher capped an 80-yard drive in nine plays with a six-yard keeper to cut the deficit in half, 14-7, with 4:23 to play in the half. Of the nine plays during the possession, seven were on the ground and Dasher completed both of his pass attempts for 22 yards, connecting with Tavarres Jefferson and D.D. Kyles on consecutive plays. Dasher had three rushes of his own, gathering 25 yards to keep the drive alive.

The next half began with the two teams trading possessions before the Yellow Jackets capitalized on their second drive. Following a 39-yard punt by Josh Davis to give Georgia Tech the ball at the MT 45, Allen raced 32 yards on the third play from scrimmage to push the lead to 21-7 with 9:06 left in the third quarter.

The momentum stayed with the Jackets when their defense caused a Dasher fumble on a third-down blitz, creating another short field at the MT 38. Dominique Reese rushed in from his defensive backfield position to hit Dasher's blind side and Anthony Egbuniwe grabbed the ball for the Blue Raiders' fourth miscue.

Five plays later, Nesbitt hooked up with Stephen Hill for a leaping 26-yard grab in the endzone and

increase the gap to 21, 28-7, with 4:43 to go in the third quarter. Nesbitt had kept the drive going just a play earlier, darting forward for a three-yard gain on a fourth-and-one rush.

Middle Tennessee could not manage much traction on its next possession, as Tanner coughed the ball up on the team's second play after being hit by Burnett and Steven Sylvester recovered. GT worked the short-field advantage into another score. Allen received a Nesbitt pitch and found pay dirt from five yards away, capping the five-play, 30-yard possession, eclipsing just 2:48 off the clock to put the Yellow Jackets ahead 35-7 with 1:14 left in the third frame.

Neither team was able to do much offensively until the Blue Raiders used a middle of the quarter touchdown with 6:04 remaining to close within 35-14 after a Dasher closed an 82-yard, seven-play possession with a one-yard carry. The senior quarterback was 5-of-5 for 78 yards through the air during the drive, finding Richard Drake twice, along with Shane Blissard, Malcolm Beyah and Jefferson once apiece.

The teams then traded turnovers, starting with a Georgia Tech fumble recovered by Eric Russell after a Denzell Guerra force, was followed by another interception, as Isaiah Johnson grabbed the errant pass. After Dasher's fourth pick of the afternoon, third-string signal-caller David Sims led the Yellow Jackets to the game's final score, crossing into the endzone with 1:35 left on a 20-yard keeper to make it 42-14. Georgia Tech needed just two plays to cover 24 yards.

Middle Tennessee will return to action when it begins the Sun Belt stretch drive with a 3:30 p.m. Homecoming meeting with ULM Saturday at Floyd Stadium. The game will be broadcast, as was today's, on ESPN3.com.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:

TURNOVERS STILL HAUNTING MT:
Middle Tennessee entered play today last in the nation in turnover margin and it will not get any better after the Georgia Tech game. The Blue Raiders turned the ball over six times, including three interceptions in the first half and another in the fourth quarter. The Yellow Jackets turned the miscues into 28 points. For the year, MT has now turned the ball over 19 times in six games and opponents have scored 79 points off those turnovers.

JEFFERSON SHINES:
Sophomore Tavarres Jefferson enjoyed his best game of the season by hauling in five receptions for 48 yards. Jefferson, who set his career-high with seven grabs at Troy last year, came into today's game with just two receptions.

FIELD POSITION:
The Blue Raider defense has been put in some difficult positions the past few games. Over the last four games, the opposition has scored 17 times and 11 of those the opponent started in Middle Tennessee territory.

KELLEM HAS CAREER-HIGH:
Senior safety Jeremy Kellem turned in a career-high with 13 tackles against Georgia Tech. Kellem, the team's leading tackler, had a previous high of 12 stops set against Kentucky in 2008.

QUICK HITTERS:

MT fell to 2-8 all-time against the ACC ... The six turnovers today mark the most by the Blue Raiders in a game since having five at Oklahoma in 2006 and are the most under head coach Rick Stockstill ... Middle Tennessee lost the coin toss for the sixth time this season ... Georgia Tech's score on its opening drive marked the third time this season an opponent has scored on its first possession ... S Jeremy Kellem played in his team-high 43rd career game today ... OT Mark Fisher started his 40th career game today ... Kevin Brown, Rod Issac, and Jeremy Kellem started together in the secondary against GT for the 24th straight game ... With his second quarter and fourth quarter touchdown runs, Dwight Dasher now has 20 career rushing scores and four this season.

Printed on December 11, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/48638