

Tanner scores twice in Blue Raider loss

Senior running back tops team with 87 rushing yards

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee fell behind 14-0 through the first quarter and could not mount enough offense to complete the comeback in dropping a 23-17 decision to North Texas in Sun Belt action Saturday afternoon in front of 14,227 at Floyd Stadium in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Phillip Tanner led the Blue Raider ground attack with 87 yards, five more than quarterback Dwight Dasher. Tanner scored both MT touchdowns, including a 51-yarder in the second quarter. Garrett Andrews hauled in a game-high tying four receptions for 41 yards.

Lance Dunbar gained 226 yards on 36 carries, including a long of 65. Riley Dodge finished 16-of-25 through the air for 167 yards, connecting with Tyler Stradford for a game-best tying four catches.



Jeremy Kellem and Arness Ikner topped the Middle Tennessee defense with 13 and 12 tackles, respectively, including 11 solo apiece. The Blue Raiders posted nine tackles for a loss of 20 yards throughout the game with eight players having 1.0 each.

North Texas struck first on its third possession. Dunbar got the Mean Green out from inside their own 5-yard line with a 65-yard scamper down the visitor sideline before being pushed out of bounds by Kellem. Three plays later, Jamaal Jackson sprinted past Marquise Dixon for a 30-yard touchdown catch from Dodge to give NT a 7-0 lead at 7:50 of the first quarter.

Benjamin Cunningham returned the ensuing kickoff 97 yards for an apparent touchdown; however, a holding call on the Blue Raiders brought the score back and set Middle Tennessee up at its own 25-yard line. The North Texas defense halted the Blue Raiders once they crossed midfield.

The Mean Green responded by covering the length of the field on their next drive and marching 91 yards on 11 plays for another touchdown to go-ahead 14-0 with five seconds remaining in the opening period. Dodge was 4-of-4 during the possession, including a 37-yard completion to Dunbar to cross midfield again. Dunbar tallied a 22-yard rush on the drive's ninth play and then capped the possession with the three-yard scoring carry.

Middle Tennessee finally put points on the board during its next drive. Although it drove to the 7-yard line, the Blue Raider offense stalled and MT settled for a 24-yard field goal by Alan Gendreau to pull within 11, 14-3, at the 12:25 mark of the second quarter.

Tanner gave Middle Tennessee a touchdown just before the intermission. As the Blue Raiders approached the midfield stripe after starting on their own 29, MT moved methodically 20 yards. Tanner then took the next play, the drive's fourth, and broke a couple tackles and went 51 yards for the score, cutting the deficit to four, 14-10, with 1:49 remaining. It is his eighth career touchdown against North Texas.

The two teams traded interceptions before the half concluded. Ikner grabbed a Dodge pass and raced 30 yards to set Middle Tennessee (3-6, 2-3 Sun Belt) up with a short field at the Mean Green 30. Dasher then gave the ball right back to North Texas on the next play, as John Shorter stepped in front for a turnover at the NT 9 and then raced 49 yards to the Blue Raider 42.

After Dodge tossed a six-yard strike to Stradford, North Texas called timeout with two seconds left. Zach Olen the booted a left-footed 53-yard field goal as time expired to send the Mean Green into the half ahead by a touchdown, 17-10. Olen's kick is the longest by an opponent against Middle Tennessee in the Blue Raiders' Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) era, since 1999.

North Texas (3-7, 3-4 Sun Belt) took its opening drive of the second half and added more points on the scoreboard courtesy of a 24-yard field goal at 5:49 on the third quarter. The Mean Green registered the longest possession time-wise by an opponent this season, consuming 9:11 off the clock during the 17-play, 62-yard drive. Dunbar accumulated 30 yards on the ground, while Dodge combined for nine carries and passes during the possession.

Middle Tennessee did not quit on its next possession and trimmed the gap to three, 20-17, on another Tanner touchdown run at 4:43 of the third stanza. It only took the Blue Raiders five plays to cover 70 yards, while being aided by a 15-yard personal foul against the NT defense, before Tanner found pay dirt for the second time in the game and ninth time in his career against the Mean Green. Tanner crossed the plane on a 21-yard jaunt around the right end, covering the final stretch untouched once he broke through the line of scrimmage, after being set up by a pair of consecutive seven-yard keepers by Dasher.

On the first possession of the fourth frame, North Texas appeared ready to tack on another touchdown. As Dunbar was set to cross the goal line, he fumbled and Jamari Lattimore pounced on the loose ball in the end zone for a Mean Green turnover and placing the ball at the 20-yard line for Middle Tennessee with the touchback.

The final score came late in the last quarter via another Olen field goal. North Texas again managed the clock well before the kicker made it a six-point difference, 23-17, with 1:10 to go. With 62 yards in front of it in an effort to score, Dasher threw his second interception to Shorter, ending any Blue Raider hopes.

Middle Tennessee returns to action at 3:15 p.m. next Saturday in Bowling Green, Ky., when it faces Western Kentucky live on CSS.

Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:

DASHER JOINS ELITE CLUB:

Blue Raider quarterback Dwight Dasher became just the 15th player in FBS history to rush for at least 2,000 yards and pass for at least 5,000 yards in a career. He needed 197 passing yards to put his name on the list and had exactly that against North Texas.

O-LINE SHAKEUP:

Middle Tennessee had just one regular offensive lineman start today against North Texas due to a rash of injuries. Senior Mark Fisher made his first career start at left tackle in place of regular Mike Williams, while Evon Lettsome and Jadareius Hamlin both made just their second career starts. Senior Chris Hawkins filled in for center Colin Boss and made his third career start, while Josh Walker earned his ninth start.

GENDREAU MOVES UP LISTS:

PK Alan Gendreau hit his 35th career field goal in the second quarter to tie him with Joe Lisle and Keegan Ray for fourth place on the all-time field goals made list. With five points today, Gendreau moved past Ray for eighth place on the all-time MT scoring list. Gendreau now has 216 career points.

DASHER INTO TOP 10:

Middle Tennessee signal-caller Dwight Dasher moved into 10th place on the Blue Raiders' all-time list with 2,182 rushing yards, surpassing Kelverrick Green (1996-99). Next on the list in ninth place is Brigham Lyons (1992-95), who accumulated 2,250 yards at MT.

TANNER SCORES AGAIN:

Phillip Tanner scored his eighth and ninth career touchdowns against North Texas when he ran one in from 51 yards out in the second quarter and 21 yards away in the third. Tanner now has 30 career touchdowns to tie Gerald Anderson for fifth on the all-time TDs list. Tanner now has 28 rushing touchdowns, a receiving score and a touchdown on a kickoff return. His 28 rushing scores move him past Walter Dunson and Gerald Anderson for fifth place all-time.

DASHER PASSES HOLCOMB:

With 279 yards of total offense today against UNT, Dwight Dasher moved past Kelly Holcomb and Clint Marks for second place on the all-time list. Dasher now has 7,182 career yards of total offense but is well behind all-time leader Wes Counts who had 8,181 yards from 1998 to 2001.

QUICK HITTERS:

UNT's 17-play, 9:11 drive in the third quarter was the longest drive by an opponent time-wise this season ... The 17 plays were the most against MT since FIU had 17 in 2006 and the 9:11 is the longest against MT in the Stockstill era ... Junior Arness Ikner came up with his first career

interception late in the second quarter ... Jamari Lattimore's second quarter sack was the 18.5 of his career and he surpassed North Texas' Brandon Kennedy (2001-03) for eighth place (18.0) on the all-time SBC sack list ... The 97-yard scoring drive by UNT in the first quarter matched the longest drive of the year against MT (Minnesota) ... S Jeremy Kellem played in his team-high 46h career game today ... OT Mark Fisher started his 43rd career game today against UNT... Dasher moved into fourth place on the school's career list for passing yards with 5,000, eclipsing Jonathan Quinn's 4,864 yards from 1995-97.

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