

March 13, 2006

Blue Raiders to begin spring drills Tuesday

MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - For the first time in the young tenure of new Head Coach Rick Stockstill, the Middle Tennessee football team will come together on the field as spring practice gets underway on Tuesday. Due to NCAA guidelines, the team will be in shorts for the first day in a practice that begins at 4 PM on the Blue Raider practice fields.

The Blue Raiders will practice every Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday from March 14 until April 8 (except the April 7 practice will be on April 6). They will host a coaching clinic on March 24-25 and a football lettermen's golf tournament on April 7.

Stockstill and his new coaching staff will welcome 13 starters and 46 lettermen to the start of spring drills in what will be a learning experience for both players and coaches.

The focus of spring practice will center around the coaching staff getting a better feel for the players and what they can do on the field.

"This spring is about our coaching staff finding out exactly what each player can and can not do," said Stockstill. "We will have a better understanding of our offense and defense based on what our players can do. It will be a learning experience for all."

Offensively, Middle Tennessee returns eight starters including senior signal caller [Clint Marks](#) and running back [Eugene Gross](#). Marks became the first quarterback in school history last year to throw for over 2,000 yards in back-to-back seasons while Gross led the Sun Belt Conference in scoring and paced all backs in receptions.

Marks and Gross have an experienced front line returning with four starters back in the fold, including all-conference tackle [Germayle Franklin](#).

The biggest area of concern on offense will be finding help at receiver following the departure of all-league performer [Cleannord Saintil](#).

Front runners at the position will be [Bobby Williams](#), [Taron Henry](#), [Pierre Ingram](#), [Michael Cannon](#), and [Dale Galvin](#). Williams, a starter as a true freshman, hauled in 22 passes in 2005 while Henry turned in his best year as a Blue Raider with 20 grabs. Ingram and Cannon had one reception each while Galvin sat out the year as a redshirt.

"Offensively, we have a lot of guys back but last year the offense was not very productive," said Stockstill. "We did not run the football well and we had way too many turnovers. We have to work on those areas this spring. You can not make mistakes and expect to win football games."

Defensively, the Blue Raiders have some big holes to fill up front on the defensive line beginning with the 2005 Sun Belt Conference Defensive Player of the Year in [Jeff Littlejohn](#) and his all-conference running mate [Quinton Staton](#). Littlejohn and Staton combined for 84 tackles and 14 tackles for loss for the league's top defensive unit.

Leading the way for the 2006 unit will be defensive end [Erik Walden](#), linebacker [J.K. Sabb](#), and defensive back [Bradley Robinson](#). For the second straight year, Walden led the Blue Raiders in sacks while Sabb paced the team in tackles and tackles for loss. Robinson turned in a career-best five interceptions and is clearly one of the top corners in the league.

"Defensively, it is not a secret that we have to find replacements for (Jeff) Littlejohn and (Quinton) Staton up front," said Stockstill. "Those guys were very effective and made things happen, so now it is time for some of the younger guys to step up and fill those roles."

On the injury front, sophomore running back [Alex Suber](#), fullback [Hunter Birtsch](#), center [Marcus Gates](#), and senior [Kevin Copeland](#) will be held out of spring drills because of post surgical rehabilitation. All four players are expected to be ready when camp opens in August.

The Blue Raiders will conclude spring practice on April 8 with the Blue-White Spring Game at Floyd Stadium. More details will be available at a later date on GoBlueRaiders.com.



QB Clint Marks and 45 other returning lettermen will hit the field for the first time Tuesday as spring practice gets underway. (J. Intintoli)

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/4962>