Stockstill pleased with early spring results; Blue Raiders don pads Saturday

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee completed its second spring practice under first-year coach Rick Stockstill Friday excited about what has been accomplished in a short time and looking forward to what lies ahead.

The Blue Raiders will put on full pads for the first time this spring when they take the field Saturday at 10 a.m., and Stockstill, like the players, is eager to see who steps to the forefront.

" I think the big thing (Saturday) is finding out who the tough guys are," Stockstill said. "Everybody looks good out here in shorts and shirts, and they are able to run around and all of that. Now we will found out who the tough guys are because you can't run and hide. With the pads on you find out who your men are."

Sophomore defensive linemen Trevor Jenkins showed tremendous potential when he played in 10 of 11 games during his freshman season in 2005. He recorded 11 tackles in a reserve role and is among the Blue Raiders excited to get into the pads Saturday.

"Coach said he is going to let us go out there and be who we are, not necessarily worry about technique but see who the athletes are," Jenkins said. "That's a dream for a player, just go out there and make plays."

EARLY REVIEWS GOOD: Stockstill said he has been pleased with the first two practices of the spring as the team has focused on fundamentals and the installation of offensive and defensive schemes while working in shorts and jerseys.

"I think it has been a good two days in shirts," Stockstill said. "I thought our effort was good and our enthusiasm has been good in both practices. Right now it has been good and I've been pleased with their effort."

Effort and enthusiasm has been prevalent; however, mental mistakes have, as well.

"We have thrown a lot at them, both offensively and defensively, so there have been some mental mistakes, which is understandable," Stockstill said. "I think the kids are thinking a little too much right now because they are not exactly sure of what they are doing. Once they get to know what they are doing then their athletic ability will show up a little more. They are learning a new offense, new defense, new tempo, and a new way of doing things so their heads are swimming a little bit."

Jenkins said the team's attitude has been solid at the outset of spring practice.

"The first couple of practices have been very good, effective practices," Jenkins said. "There's a different intensity and everybody is focused and excited about new season and a new coach. We are going to build on that great foundation we had from last year and take it to a new level."

WELCOME BACK: Sophomore quarterback Joe Craddock has never been happier to be on a practice field.

Craddock suffered an injury to his right knee during preseason practice last fall and required surgery and the reps he has taken this spring are the first for him in more than seven months.

"It definitely feels good to be back in action," Craddock said. "I'm excited about these first two practices and how we have looked, and I like the offense. It's going to be what we needed with our skill guys. It's easier to read coverages so I like that part of it, too."

Craddock has been able to participate in 1-on-1 passing drills, and he's been able to work in skeleton drills and during sessions when quarterbacks throw against air; however, Stockstill said the reps will start to decrease when the team practices in pads.

"(Craddock) is still limited in what he can do," Stockstill said. "When we go team and put 11 out there he can't do that because he his knee is not yet 100 percent. I know he is having a good time and he's excited to be out here."

SCOUT DAY: Middle Tennessee held its annual "Scout Day" Friday and 15 NFL franchises were represented - the most since 19 scouts were in attendance in 2003.

The 10 Blue Raiders on hand to work out for the scouts were Jeff Littlejohn, Quinton Staton, Danny Tolbert, Devarick Scandrett, Bobby Payne, Nick McAfee, Marcus Roebuck, Cleannord Saintil, Keon Raymond, Willie Hall.

NFL teams represented at the Scout Day were Tennessee, Dallas, Buffalo, Miami, New York Giants, New Orleans, Minnesota, Jacksonville, Green Bay, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Oakland, Baltimore, Houston, and Carolina.

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