

# Q&A with Head Coach Rick Stockstill

## Team begins spring drills today

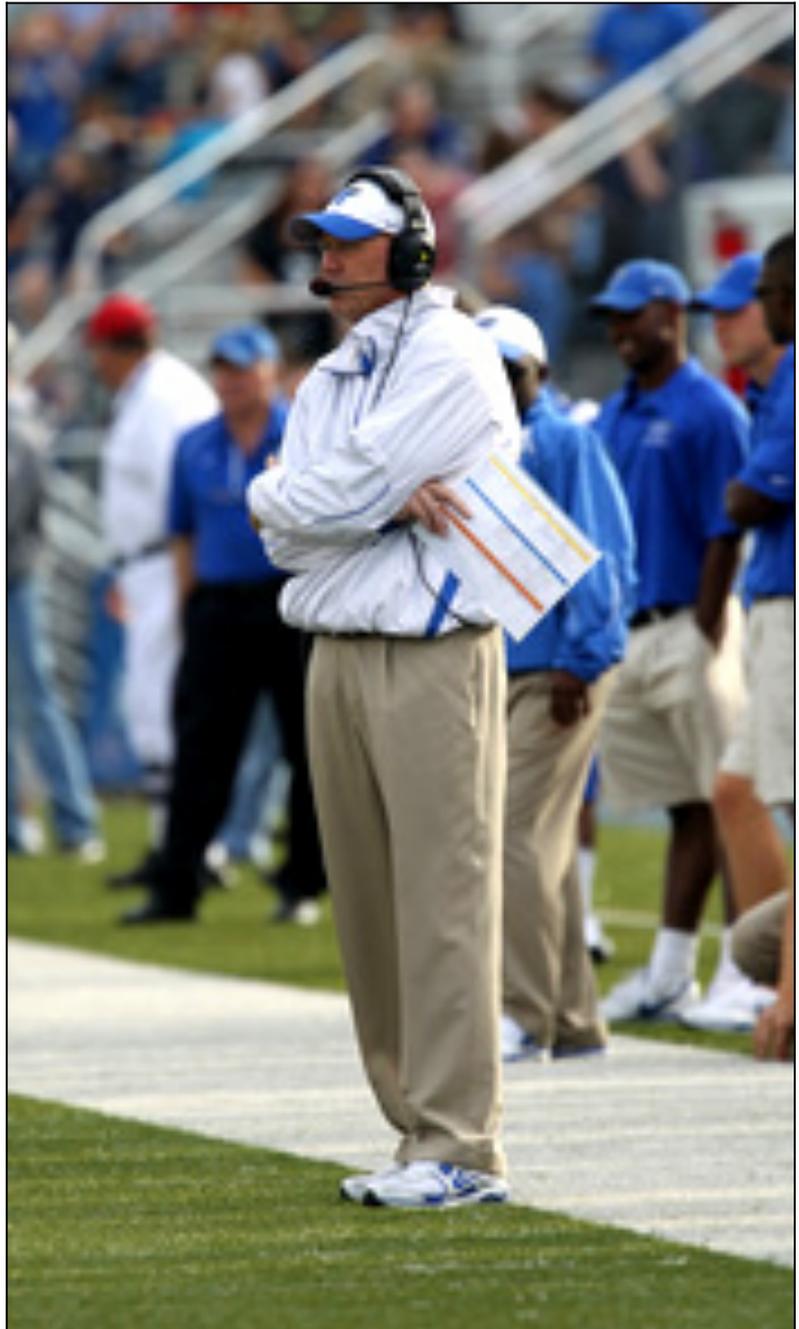
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**EACH SPRING THERE ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE A FEW PLAYERS WHO HAD OFF-SEASON SURGERY THAT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO COMPETE. CAN YOU GO OVER THE GUYS WHO WILL BE OUT FOR SPRING AND WHO WILL BE LIMITED?**

This year we have a few more guys out due to surgeries than we have had in the past. Wide receiver Vincent Van Horne is out with a knee injury, offensive lineman Colin Boss will not compete due to hip surgery, and linebacker Stephen Roberts will be limited without contact as he is still recovering from knee surgery. Marquise Branton will also be limited and offensive lineman Brandon McLeroy and wide receiver Jamar Brown will both be out following surgeries. Offensive lineman Preston Bailey will be out for the spring as he had his shoulder operated on and wide receiver Arthur Williams suffered a knee injury in offseason workouts and will not compete in the spring.

Wide receiver Jared Bamber will also be out for the spring, while wide receivers Harold Turner and Marcus Thurmond will be limited with hand injuries.

**WITH THAT MANY OFFENSIVE LINEMEN OUT, WHAT WILL YOUR GAMEPLAN BE FOR PRACTICE?**



Three starters will be out for the spring so the number one concern is to get those guys healthy when practice begins in August. That will be critical. It will also provide an opportunity for the younger guys like Jesse Grisham, Judd Hunt, and Isaiah Anderson to get some extra work, along with newcomers Micah James and Jason Rexroad. The key in the spring will be to stay healthy with what we have because we are barely two-deep going into these three weeks of practice. If things go well, we should be able to build the type of depth along the offensive line that will help us in 2011.

**YOU HAVE TWO NEW COORDINATORS AND TWO NEW STAFF MEMBERS. HOW HAVE ALL STEPPED INTO THEIR ROLES?**

Willie (Simmons) and Steve (Ellis) have done a great job. They know our players and the other coaches which is a huge benefit. The transition has been very smooth. Both have done a great job with the players and the staff over the past month.

I am really excited about Buster (Faulkner) and Joe (Cauthen) because they want to be at Middle Tennessee. They are both enthusiastic, coach with passion, and are excellent communicators. I love their work ethic and very proud to have them on this staff. Overall, I really like what we have done with our staff.

**WITH THE LOSS OF SENIOR LEADERS LIKE PHILLIP TANNER, JEREMY KELLEM, AND MARK FISHER WHO DO YOU SEE FILLING THOSE ROLES IN 2011?**

We are going to be a young team at nearly every position and you normally want your seniors to step up in that role and have a great year but it does not have to be a senior. I think Benny Cunningham is one of our best leaders and Logan Kilgore and Jeff Murphy are good leaders as well. Alex Stuart, Brandon McLeroy, Mike Williams and Preston Bailey can be good leaders. Williams should be the true leader up front because he has played a lot of football and will be lining up all through the spring. Defensively, we do not have many seniors so guys like Darin Davis, Arness Ikner, and SaCoby Carter have to be leaders for us. Omar McLendon stepped up in our offseason workouts and I believe he is a guy who will be a good leader for us. We have the potential to have some really good leadership on this team but it is a role they need to embrace. Leadership is always key to the success of a football team and I feel good about the guys getting ready to take over that role.

**WITH LOGAN KILGORE AND JEFF MURPHY BATTLING FOR THE OPEN SPOT AT QUARTERBACK, YOU HAVE TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT BOTH PLAYERS SINCE THEY GAINED SOME EXPERIENCE LAST YEAR. HAVE YOU NAMED A STARTER?**

Somebody has to take the first snap and Logan might be the guy on Wednesday and Jeff could take it on Thursday. There is no preconceived notion that either one of them is the starter. We will go through the spring and let them compete. The guy who protects the football and moves the team will be the guy. Both played a couple games last year before going down with injuries so they got a taste of football at this level. They work very hard, possess tremendous work ethic, and have all the intangibles you look for in a quarterback. The team trusts both guys. It will be fun watching the competition this spring. The two freshmen we signed will come in this fall and we will see what they can do in August.

**SINCE YOU WALKED OFF THE FIELD IN JANUARY, WHAT HAS BEEN THE ONE AREA YOU**

**HAVE STRESSED TO THE STAFF AND PLAYERS YOU WANT TO SEE IMPROVED IN 2011?**

Being a team. I did not feel like we were a close team last year like we have been in the past. I want to make sure it is WE and not ME. I have stressed with everyone to be on the same page, support each other, and pull the rope in the same direction. We have not mentioned one word about winning a certain number of games next year or winning a conference championship. We have only talked about winning the day so we will focus on winning Wednesday and then worry about Thursday on Thursday. I have signs around our offices and locker room about winning the day with three code phrases. One is doing things as fast as we can, two is effort, and three is finish everything you start.

**OFFENSIVELY, YOU RETURN SEVEN STARTERS AND 25 LETTERMEN. WHAT WILL YOU EMPHASIZE THE MOST WITH THAT UNIT OVER THE NEXT THREE WEEKS?**

Turnovers and protecting the football. I will also stress our tempo because we want to play as fast as anyone in the country while also protecting the football. Over the last two years we have won just one game when we lost the turnover battle and that was against Austin Peay. We also have to create more explosive plays because we were not effective in that area a year ago.

**SPRING PRACTICE IS CRITICAL FOR THE DEFENSE AS THEY HAVE TO REPLACE EIGHT STARTERS. WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THAT SIDE OF THE BALL?**

We need to get more turnovers and prevent explosive plays. I also want us to play very fast and be relentless. This is what is important to me. We have to develop our guys and find out who we can go to battle with but we will emphasize creating turnovers, preventing big plays, and playing fast and relentless.

**STEPHEN ROBERTS IS A PLAYER YOU WERE COUNTING ON AT LINEBACKER BEFORE A KNEE INJURY ENDED HIS SEASON IN AUGUST. CAN YOU UPDATE HIS PROGRESS?**

Stephen will be very limited this spring, it will be more like August before we see him getting out there and competing. I think he has to get his confidence back because that is usually what goes first after an injury. He has to get back in there and mix it up a little because back in August he was doing some nice things for us and making big strides. We are looking forward to having him back 100 percent in the fall because Stephen is a guy who can help this football team.

**WHO AMONG THE REDSHIRTED FRESHMEN DO YOU SEE FILLING KEY ROLES THIS SEASON?**

Offensively, Judd Hunt and Isaiah Anderson on the line have to provide us some quality depth. Reggie Whatley is a real explosive and dynamic player who will help us at receiver, and Kyle Griswold has a high skill level that should make us better at receiver as well.

Defensively, Sammy Seamster and Kenneth Gilstrap played as freshmen but sat out last year with injuries, and we are anxious to see those guys back on the field. Linebackers Craig Allen and David Jones saw action on special teams last year and I feel like they are ready to step up. Also, Leighton Gasque, Christian Henry, and Jonathan Brooks have enjoyed great off seasons so far and we are excited about them. All these guys are really athletic and run well so we are looking forward to having them on the field. Patrick McNeil is another guy we are expecting a lot from along the defensive line.

**THE BLUE RAIDERS HAVE NOW GONE TO BOWL GAMES THREE TIMES IN FIVE YEARS.  
WHAT DOES THAT SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM NOW AND WHERE IT IS HEADED?**

It shows consistency in our program and that we are building it the right way. We have been competitive with the people we play and now we have to continue building on the foundation we have laid. When a program shows this type of consistency then it gains credibility on a national and regional scale. We are not where we want to be as a program but we continue to make strides every year.

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