

Ellis wants aggressive defense with a bad attitude

High energy, intensity describes new coordinator

March 18, 2011 · Athletic Communications

Soon after his team played in the GoDaddy.com Bowl, Head Coach Rick Stockstill named veteran assistant coaches Steve Ellis and Willie Simmons as the new defensive and offensive coordinators for the Blue Raiders.

GoBlueRaiders.com sat down this week with Steve Ellis to talk about his added responsibilities, and what he hopes to accomplish in spring practice sessions.

STEVE ELLIS - Defensive Coordinator. One month into his third year at Middle Tennessee, Ellis will move from coaching cornerbacks and coordinating special teams to rebuilding a Blue Raider defensive unit that has

lost eight starters from the 2010 team. He came to Middle Tennessee from his alma mater, Nicholls State, where he played cornerback for four years, then joined the staff there in 2003 as safeties coach. In 2004-05, Ellis coached the linebackers, and then was named Defensive Coordinator in 2006, a job he held until he joined the Blue Raiders in 2009.

Here are his thoughts on such topics as his additional duties, replacing departed starters, developing team leaders, bringing newcomers into the scheme, and what he hopes to accomplish in the 15 sessions of spring practice.

GBR.com: What will be your additional duties as Defensive Coordinator?

ELLIS: To oversee the entire defense, to make sure we are structurally and fundamentally sound. Make sure that everyone from the coaches to the ball boys understands what we are trying to do,



that this is a total team defense and everybody is involved and needs to understand the importance of team defense.

GBR.com: The last two years, you coached the cornerbacks and were also Special Teams Coordinator. Will you keep that responsibility?

ELLIS: Special teams will shift over to Coach Joe Cauthen, who will also coach the linebackers. I will still coach the cornerbacks and will have a hand in special teams.

GBR.com: Eight defensive starters have graduated, so you will have a lot of positions to fill, including defensive end where Jamari Lattimore was the Sun Belt Conference Defensive Player of the Year. That will be hard to do. Is there a positive upside to all of this?

ELLIS: YES, all of those players who graduated were really good players, about half of them were All-Conference at least once. But we have a good group of guys coming back who have really bought into the system. We think they are very talented players who will have the opportunity to showcase their own skills now. We are excited about the young guys that we have here. The level of expectation will not change from previous years. We are going to throw those guys in the fire, coach them on the run, and play fast and relentless. It doesn't matter if its James Bond or James Brown out there, we've got to go.

GBR.com: You are a high energy, intense type of coach. Will your defense reflect that?

ELLIS: I believe that whatever you take ownership over; you want the finished product to be exactly like you want it. It starts with intensity, and with a passion for football. It involves playing the game with a bad attitude, understanding your job, understanding your accountability level, where everybody has to be at. You can't play defense without fire and passion. And an attitude is the biggest thing. You have got to have an attitude that makes you want to be the baddest man in the valley.

GBR.com: Do you recruit that, or instill that after they get here?

ELLIS: We try to recruit it, try to recruit guys that love to play defense, that play like their house is on fire. And when they get here, they see we are an aggressive, attacking style defense. We recruit that, but it is reinforced in them even more. We are bred to go-go-go, attack-attack-attack. We are bred to be aggressive.

GBR.com: Going into spring drills, what do you see as the strengths of our defense?

ELLIS: I think in 2009, we were very dominant. Last year we were just average. I think there are four or five plays a game that we have to change. In '09 we made those plays, last year we didn't make those plays. One of the biggest things we want to do this spring is to be ready to re-capture those plays, to get back to the standard of excellence that we have. You have to play every play like it was your last play. On the board in the Game Day room, we have a saying, "WIN THE PLAY". We want to win that play, and then win the next play, then the next one. You never know when a turning-point play is going to come, so you have to win every play. The biggest emphasis this spring will be on effort and winning the play.

GBR.com: Where do you want your defense to be at the end of spring drills?

ELLIS: The biggest thing is to understand the importance of team defense. We are givers, we are not receivers. I think these guys understand that we are a band of brothers, that we are one unit, and that we are accountable to each other. **GBR.com:** Address the significance of creating depth in spring drills.

ELLIS: In any organization, depth is one of those things you want to have. And its one of the things we need to have when we finish those 15 practices. Some of those guys have been here a while, but haven't had a chance to play much yet because we have been so experienced the past couple of years. This spring is the opportunity for them to expand their roles, to grasp the techniques we will be teaching, and to have the chance to play down-in, down-out, in the football games.

GBR.com: You've been here for a couple of years now, and know all of the defensive players. That has to be a big advantage.

ELLIS: It's a big advantage. Even if they weren't "my guys", I knew what their strengths and weaknesses were. They have been here long enough to get comfortable in what we do. They are excited. They had a great offseason. But the one thing that hasn't changed is their work ethic. This offseason has been one of the best since I've been here from a work ethic standpoint.

GBR.com: Where do you see your team leadership coming from?

ELLIS: It is going to come from a majority of positions. Leadership is built on guys doing the right thing, being in the right place, and let their actions, both on and off the field, be the deciding factors as to who will be the leaders. We have already had some guys step up as great leaders. You could see those guys in winter workouts taking over those leadership roles. Guys like Justin Jones, Omar McClenden, Derrick Crumpton, and Eric Russell. Those guys are going to be key for us if we are going to take this football team in the direction that we envision it. Those are four guys that we are going to pass the torch to, and that we are really counting on this spring.

Spring Practice for the Blue Raiders began on Wednesday, and will go into early April. Weather permitting; the team will practice ten times in March, and five times in April, including the spring game which will wind things up on April 9th.

Printed on July 23, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/52011>