

Stockstill pleased at halfway point

Team returns to field today; Pope latest signee

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

At the mid-way point of spring practice, Head Coach Rick Stockstill likes what he has seen from his young team through eight of the NCAA allowed 15 practices.

"I have been really pleased with our team's attitude, work ethic, and how they have competed the first half of spring," said Stockstill. "We

have been good in seven of our eight practices, with only one not living up to our standards. We have really seen some young guys get better."



Offensively, an increased tempo and protecting the football remains a priority but a number of players have shined individually.

Junior Benny Cunningham has been very impressive at running back while Kyle Griswold and Reggie Whatley have adapted well to the move to wide receiver.

"I love the way (Benny) Cunningham approaches each practice," added Stockstill. "He never takes a day off."

Veteran receivers Sancho McDonald and Malcolm Beyah have both shown consistency and Stockstill said McDonald is bringing his "hard hat to work everyday".

Up front, three starters are missing which has allowed some of the younger guys to progress with added reps. Senior Mike Williams and redshirt freshman Isaiah Anderson have been very consistent.

"I know what the guys sitting out can do and our main focus is getting them back healthy in August," said Stockstill. "With more young guys in the lineup our offense has not slowed down and it should only help improve our depth when the season approaches."

Under center, Logan Kilgore and Jeff Murphy continue to battle for the starting job. Both have enjoyed good springs while providing excellent leadership.

Defensively, the Blue Raiders have to find eight new starters including their entire line. Despite the inexperience, Stockstill likes the direction they are headed.

In the secondary, Arness Ikner has been competing at a high level and Kenneth Gilstrap and Sammy Seamster appear to be 100 percent after missing last year with injuries. Eric Russell has also been a bright spot.

One position that has really opened Stockstill's eyes is linebacker where senior Darin Davis leads the way. Davis, along with Justin Jones and Corey Carmichael, has been very consistent, but sophomore David Jones is a guy who has "made plays everyday".

Speedsters Craig Allen, Jonathan Brooks, Christian Henry, and Leighton Gasque are making noise. "They may not always know where they are going but they arrive really fast," said Stockstill.

Omar McLendon has been the most consistent up front and has done a good job of getting better everyday and trying to lead.

Redshirt freshman Patrick McNeil has enjoyed a good spring and Dearco Nolan has responded well to playing inside and outside. Max Ugboaja and Jiajuan Fennell bring speed and effort while Jimmy Staten has also been solid.

The Blue Raiders return to the practice field Wednesday and will continue each day through Saturday. The team will conclude spring drills on April 9 with the annual Blue-White Game.

POPE IS LATEST SIGNEE

Kevin Pope, a 6-3, 230-pound defensive end from Fullerton College is the latest signee in the 2011 class for Rick Stockstill and the Blue Raiders.

During his sophomore year at Fullerton College, Pope tallied 27 tackles, two sacks, two quarterback hurries and forced one fumble. It was good enough to earn him a spot on the National Southern Conference first team, and he was named the school's freshman defensive player of the year the previous season.

Pope joins wide receiver Jamal Gray (6-1, 190) and defensive lineman Paramore Tapa (6-3, 275) as student-athletes who have joined the Blue Raider roster after the February signing day.

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