

Blue Raiders open 2011 at Purdue

MT opens with Big Ten foe for 2nd straight year

September 2, 2011 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee, a team with lots of question marks, but also a team with a lot of young talent and high expectations, will open the 2011 football season on the road against a Purdue team that is expected to be much improved from a year ago.

The Blue Raiders and Boilermakers will kick off at noon (11 am CDT) in West Lafayette, Indiana, and the game will be televised on the Big Ten Network. Locally, the game will be shown on Comcast channels 266 or 293 (HD) and on Direct TV channels 612 or 612-1 (HD). Fans with Dish Network can see the Blue Raiders on channels 5442 or 5443 (HD) while AT&T U-Verse will broadcast the game on channels 692 and 1692 (HD).

Chip Walters (pxp) and Kelly Holcomb (color analysis) will be calling the game on the Blue Raider Network, with pre-game, halftime and post-game shows live from Fanatics, the official viewing and listening party for road games.

This will mark the second year in a row that the Blue Raiders have played a Big Ten team in the first game. Last year, Minnesota came to Murfreesboro and won by a 24-17 score. Both Middle Tennessee and Purdue are hoping to get 2011 off to a successful start after less-than-anticipated seasons last year. The Blue Raiders closed 2010 with three consecutive wins but lost to Miami (O.) in the GoDaddy.com Bowl to finish 6-7 overall. Purdue will be trying to snap a six-game losing streak that closed a 4-8 season on the field.



Redshirt Sophomore Logan Kilgore will be starting at quarterback for the Blue Raiders for the second consecutive season. Against Minnesota, he connected on 13-18 passes for 172 yards, including a 22-yard scoring strike to Sancho McDonald just before the half that tied the score at 14-14. Kilgore suffered a toe injury in practice the following week that eventually forced him to take a medical redshirt year after playing in only three games.

Now back and healthy once again, Kilgore has emerged as the leader of the MT offense, and he's looking forward to the challenge.

"Logan is making much better decisions now," pointed out Blue Raider Head Coach Rick Stockstill. "He is learning from his mistakes. When he forces a ball in practice, he'll come back the next time that situation arises and make a better decision."

Despite playing in only three games, it didn't take Kilgore long to find a favorite receiver in speedster Malcolm Beyah. The duo hooked up for touchdowns of 52 yards against Memphis and 62 yards against Louisiana. The Kilgore-Beyah connection has clicked often in spring drills and fall camp, and could be a major weapon for the Blue Raiders this season. Junior Jeff Murphy will back up Kilgore.

Junior Benny Cunningham will take over the No. 1 running back slot from Phillip Tanner, who is now with the Dallas Cowboys. Sophomore William Pratcher has taken advantage of injuries to senior D.D. Kyles to move into the back-up role.

Beyah is not the only veteran receiver for Middle Tennessee. Seniors McDonald and Tyler Mason and junior Tavarres Jefferson will start alongside Beyah vs. Purdue, but as many as a dozen receivers will play in the Blue Raiders up-tempo offense.

While some positions on the team do not have the amount of experience that Stockstill and his staff would like, the offensive line is not one of them. Seniors Mike Williams and Brandon McLeroy will start on the left side with redshirt junior Alex Stuart at center. Redshirt sophomores Josh Walker and Jadareius Hamlin will open at right tackle and guard, respectively. All but Walker have started as freshmen. Defensively, quickness and speed are two main attributes, while size and experience are lacking. It will be a blitzing, stunting, attacking defense under new coordinator Steve Ellis. "The talent is there, it's just not as experienced or as big as teams in the Big Ten," noted Ellis.

Up front, junior Omar McClendon will start at left end, while redshirt freshman Jiajuan Fennell will make his collegiate debut at right end. The tackles will be redshirt junior Kendall Dangerfield and redshirt sophomore Jimmy Staten.

Backing the line will be senior Darin Davis and sophomores Corey Carmichael and Craig Allen.

Middle Tennessee lost three 4-year starters to graduation since last fall, but has a surprising amount of experience returning at defensive back. Safeties will be Derrick Crumpton, who has started every game at nickel back since he was a freshman, and senior Eric Russell, who also returns kickoffs. The corners will be senior Arness Ikner, a junior college transfer who started last season, and redshirt sophomore speedster Kenneth Gilstrap, who had the fastest times in the nation in the 100m and 200m as a high school senior.

Blocking kicks has always been a trademark of Stockstill coached teams, and the speed is there to

create havoc again this year.

The kicking game is in the capable hands, and feet, of two All-Sun Belt Conference performers, senior placekicker Alan Gendreau and red-shirt sophomore punter Josh Davis. Gendreau has kicked 38 field goals and 126 extra points in his three years. Included in those are streaks of 12 consecutive field goals and 40 consecutive extra points. He also holds the Sun Belt record for a FG of 55 yards.

Davis burst onto the scene early last fall when he punted four times for a school and conference record 59.8 yd average at Memphis. His average for the season was 47.2 yards on 58 punts, 19 of which he put inside the opponents 20 yard line. He also boomed 16 punts of 50 yards or more, including a 78 yarder at Memphis, the second longest in school history.

Fans not attending the game at Purdue are encouraged to listen to the play-by-play on the Blue Raider Network. Flagship stations are WNSR 560 AM in Nashville, and Murfreesboro flagship stations WGNS 1450 AM and WMOT 89.5 FM. Web audio is available on GoBlueRaiders.com.

Printed on July 25, 2014

Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/54532>