Blue Raiders nearly pull off win at Purdue in season opener

Middle Tennessee opens at Big Ten opponent

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WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – Middle Tennessee led for much of the day, but a last-minute touchdown and blocked field goal allowed Big Ten foe Purdue to escape with a 27-24 victory Saturday afternoon in front of 42,110 at Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Ind. The Blue Raiders had one last chance to force the first overtime contest in the Rick Stockstill era but were denied on the game's final play. Quarterback Logan Kilgore led the MT offense with 330 yards on 27-of-45 with two touchdowns and just one interception. He found nine different receivers, a pack paced by Tavarres Jefferson with a career-best seven catches for 61 yards. Malcolm Beyah, Sancho McDonald and Benny Cunningham collected four receptions apiece with Beyah topping the squad with 89 yards. Cunningham was the leading ground gainer with 65 yards on 14 attempts. His total equaled exactly one-half of the Blue Raiders' team accumulation. Eric Russell set the bar on the defense with 13 tackles, including 11 stops and one for loss which was a sack. He also grabbed the lone MT interception of the afternoon. Craig Allen was next with nine tackles, three more than T.L. Edwards' half dozen. Offensively, Caleb TerBush completed 19-of-33 for 219 yards, two touchdowns and an interception for the Boilermakers. Justin Siller was his top receiver with 55 yards on five grabs. Ralph Bolden led all players on the ground with 17 rushes for 120 yards. Purdue garnered over 200 yards on 46 carries despite the Blue Raiders winning the total yardage battle, 460 to 420. Joe Holland was the top tackler with 14 stops, including eight solo, while Will Lucas added seven tackles. Middle

Tennessee took advantage of the first turnover of the game, after the Boilermakers fumbled a Nathaniel Toulson punt. The Blue Raiders' opening possession started on their own 1-yard line before stalling out at the 38. Ricardo Allen grabbed Toulson's kick and raced six yards before Cunningham forced the ball loose and Norman Washington pounced on it to return the ball back to MT at the Purdue 22. Just three plays later, Kilgore located Beyah across the middle for a 26-yard scoring strike to give the Blue Raiders a 7-0 lead with 8:19 left in the first quarter. The Boilermakers began their next drive at their own 38. Ralph Bolden carried much of the load, compiling 19 yards on four rushes, before Carson Wiggs lined up for a 50-yard field goal try. His attempt from the middle of the hash marks split the uprights to pull Purdue within four, 7-3, at the 5:52 mark. Middle Tennessee (0-1) was stopped after just 13 yards on its next possession; however, Toulson launched another long kick, 66 yards, which was downed by Russell at the 1-yard line. Unfortunately for the Blue Raiders, the kick did not stand after a penalty and MT was forced to re-try. Josh Davis came in for the re-kick and his boot was not nearly as effective as Toulson's, as the Boilermakers started on their own 37-yard line. Neither team would score again before the opening 15 minutes expired. As Purdue continued its drive into the opening moments of the second frame, a pair of penalties set the host back. First, the Boilermakers were called for offensive pass interference and then holding, making it third-and-33 from the MT 42. TerBush's third-down attempt was then picked off by Russell at the MT 21 before returning it 34 yards to the Boilermaker 45-yard line. Despite the short field, the Blue Raiders were unable to advance it and Davis' second punt was downed at the 2-yard line. It took one play for Purdue to get out of the jam, as TerBush connected with Siller for a 31-yard completion. The Boilermakers continued to drive down the field only to be stopped on an apparent third down, but another penalty on Middle Tennessee breathed new life into the Purdue offense from just seven yards out. Following a Jared Crank five-yard rush on the first down, he was on the receiving end of a TerBush toss two plays later as the Boilermakers capped the seven-play, 98-yard possession to take a 10-7 edge with 7:32 left in the half. The long drive managed to take just 4:17 off the clock. After neither team scored on their ensuing possessions, the Blue Raiders covered 95 yards in just eight plays to regain the lead with 2:10 remaining in the second quarter. Kilgore was 3-of-3 on the drive for 65 yards, including a 21-yard touchdown pass to McDonald, where the receiver danced through the Purdue (1-0) defense before crossing the goal line to put MT back on top, 14-10. Kilgore also ran for 13 yards, his longest career rush, before linking up with Beyah for a 29-yarder across the middle to advance the ball past midfield a couple plays later. Both teams had the ball one last time before the half expired but neither could find the end zone. Both teams were stalled offensively through the first six minutes of the third quarter. On the fourth play of Middle Tennessee's second possession, Dwayne Beckford intercepted Kilgore to give the Boilermakers the ball back on the MT 44. The Blue Raider defense held firm, forcing another Purdue punt. Middle Tennessee appeared to be heading for another score late in the third quarter, amassing 67 yards on 11 plays. The Blue Raiders pushed the ball ahead to the 15-yard line, but a holding penalty set them up with a first-and-20 at the 25. The offense was unable to muster more than three yards on the next three plays and Preseason All-Sun Belt kicker Alan Gendreau missed a 39-yard field goal wide right with 1:05 on the clock, keeping MT up just four. The Blue Raiders tacked on a field goal, a 42-yarder by Gendreau, early in the final stanza at 13:58 to push their advantage to seven, 17-10. Middle Tennessee managed just 12 yards on the drive after Tyler Mason returned Cody Webster's punt 28 yards to the Boilermaker 38 before running out of bounds. Just when it seemed as though the Blue Raider defense was going to stop another Purdue drive, on a third-and-three from the 30-yard line, Akeem Shavers ripped off a 30-yard burst up the middle to knot the scoring at 17-17 with 11:44 to play. Russell hauled in the ensuing kickoff at the goal line and returned it back 40 yards, providing Middle Tennessee with a good starting position. The Blue Raiders then methodically moved down

the remaining 60 yards, using just eight plays, before back-to-back carries by Cunningham pushed the ball into the end zone. His scoring plunge, from two yards out at 9:26 for a 24-17 MT edge, was set up by consecutive Kilgore completions to Tavarres Jefferson, including a one-legged stretch along the home sideline to the Purdue 14-yard line. The Boilermakers responded with a quick drive to the MT 20 before the defense continued to stand firm. A penalty helped push Purdue backwards before Wiggs drained a 47-yard field goal at 5:57 to cut the margin to four once again, 24-20. The home team, however, did not quit and TerBush led the Boilermakers to the winning score by finding Antavian Edison with just 49 seconds remaining to decide the final margin. Purdue started on its own 15 and covered the 85 yards in 11 plays, taking 3:04 off the clock, for the go-ahead touchdown. Middle Tennessee made one last push, advancing across the midfield stripe. The drive reached the Boilermaker 30-yard line before Gendreau lined up for the field goal from 47 yards away. His kick with five seconds remaining was blocked, sealing the Purdue victory. The Blue Raiders will return to Murfreesboro for a 6 p.m. kickoff next Saturday when they play host to ACC opponent Georgia Tech in the home opener. Middle Tennessee will be holding its Centennial Celebration all weekend.
Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes: FIRST TIME STARTERS: Middle Tennessee had seven players make their first career start today and six were on defense. The first timers were DE Omar McLendon, DT Kendall Dangerfield, DT Jimmy Staten, DE Jiajuan Fennell, LB Craig Allen, and S Eric Russell. The lone first-time offensive starter was WR Anthony Amos. **JEFFERSON HAS CAREER BEST:** Junior wide receiver Tavarres Jefferson had a career game against Purdue. The Nashville, Tenn., native hauled in seven receptions for 61 yards, including a huge third down catch midway in the 4th quarter to extend a drive. Jefferson's previous high in catches was five.
KILGORE HAS CAREER GAME: QB Logan Kilgore enjoyed a strong opener on the road by completing 27 of 45 passes for a career-high 330 yards. Kilgore also tossed two touchdown passes which also ranked as a personal-best. Kilgore now owns two career 200-yard passing games with the other one coming last year at Louisiana when he tallied 207 yards in a road win. **BEYAH IS BACK:** After a strong fall camp, WR Malcolm Beyah vowed to return to his freshman year form and he got off to a good start against Purdue. The senior hauled in four receptions for 89 yards and one touchdown. He now has nine career touchdown receptions. **LONG DRIVE:** Middle Tennessee regained the lead late in the second quarter with a nice 95-yard scoring drive. It marked the 8th scoring drive of 90 or more yards under Stockstill and the longest since MT went 96 yards for a score against Austin Peay in 2010. Overall, it went down as the fifth longest scoring drive under Stockstill. **SPECIAL TEAMS UPDATE:** Middle Tennessee enjoyed a strong game on special teams in the season opener. The Blue Raiders forced a fumble on a Purdue punt, downed a punt at the 2-yard line and had another one downed at the 1-yard line but it was negated by a penalty. Nathaniel Toulson punted five times for a 40.4 yard average and Alan Gendreau connected on both his PATs and a 42-yard field goal. **RUSSELL GETS PICK/SACK:** Safety Eric Russell registered his first career interception when he picked off a Purdue pass in the second quarter. The senior returned it 34 yards and later added his first career sack, also in the second quarter. He topped the Blue Raider defense with 13 tackles, including 11 solo stops. **AMOS GETS START:** Walk-on receiver Anthony Amos made his first collegiate start today against Purdue and also hauled in his first reception. Amos, a standout in the spring, is from Fayetteville, N.C. **TRUE FRESHMEN TO DRESS:** Middle Tennessee had four true freshmen travel and dress in the season opener against Purdue. DE Shubert Bastien, DT J.D. Jones, DS Blaine Sidders and QB Shaun White **QUICK HITTERS:** LB Darin Davis made his team leading 14th straight start today … Today's 11:01 AM Central kickoff was the earliest for MT since 2004 at Florida and the earliest in the Stockstill era … OT Mike Williams made his team-leading 37th career start today … Alex Stuart made his first collegiate start at center today … RB Benny Cunningham recorded his first career forced fumble in the first quarter to set up

the Blue Raiders' first TD of 2011 … Omar McLendon and Kenneth Gilstrap combined for MT's first sack of the season in the first quarter … Shane Blissard now has at least one catch in 11 straight games to lead MT … Logan Kilgore recorded his longest career run in the second quarter when he picked up a first down with a 13-yard carry … Alan Gendreau's 4th quarter 42-yard field goal was the 39th of his career and he needs one more to tie Brian Kelly for 2nd all-time.

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