Middle Tennessee falls just short despite Kilgore's big day

Blue Raiders open SBC slate with tough loss

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TROY, Ala. – Logan Kilgore put up a passing performance for the ages for Middle Tennessee, but his final attempt to bring the Blue Raiders back fell short, and host Troy escaped with a 38-35 victory Saturday at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Troy, Ala., in front of 20,185 fans. Kilgore finished his career day 28-of-48 for 415 yards, the third highest in school history for a game, and five touchdowns to five different receivers. His lone interception came on the final MT play of the contest. Malcolm Beyah was on the receiving end of most of the passes, grabbing a career-best seven for 79 yards, while Anthony Amos led the corps with 84 yards, one of four catchers with at least 75 yards on the day. Benny Cunningham also crossed the 100-yard plateau for the first time in his career, finishing with 117 yards on 19 carries. His effort helped Middle Tennessee control the ground advantage, 167-to-132, and overall yardage battle, 582-to-479. On the Trojans' first possession, Reginald Farmer slipped through the line and got a hand on Will Goggans' punt; however, the kick still traveled 42 yards for the Blue Raiders to begin their next drive at their own 24-yard line. Middle Tennessee was stopped after three plays, forcing another Nathaniel Toulson punt. His boot was muffed by Justin Albert, and after a scrum on the loose ball, Albert fell on it, wrestling it away from Khari Burke and maintaining possession for Troy. Two plays into the Blue Raiders' third drive,

Kilgore swung a pass to Reggie Whatley. With nothing but blocks in front of him down the visitor sideline, the redshirt freshman went untouched 82 yards for the game's first score to put Middle Tennessee (0-3, 0-1 SBC) on top, 7-0, with 5:46 remaining in the first quarter for the fifth-longest reception in school history. The Blue Raiders defense continued to play aggressively on the next Trojan possession. On third down, Derrick Crumpton tipped a Corey Robinson pass into the hands of T.L. Edwards, who returned the interception 32 yards to the Troy 18-yard line. Four plays later, Middle Tennessee was stopped on a fourth-and-one from inside the 10 but a Kilgore rush up the middle was short, turning the ball back over to the Trojans. After Troy (1-2, 1-0 SBC) punted for the third time in the opening 15 minutes, Benny Cunningham spun out of tacklers for a 20-yard gain on the first MT play before the first quarter came to a conclusion. As the second quarter began, Kilgore had the ball knocked out of his hands on a Jonathan Massaquoi sack. Chris Pickett grabbed the bouncing ball at his own 38 and raced 62 yards to the other end zone to knot the scoring at 7-7 with 14:04 left in the half. Another Toulson punt pinned the Trojans deep in their own end, starting on their 7-yard line. Robinson then connected with Eric Thomas for 41 yards on a third-and-10 reception down the home sideline to escape the hole. Three plays later, Shubert Bastien stripped Chris Anderson of the ball with David Jones hauling in the recovery and the Blue Raiders regained possession at their own 40. It did not take long for Middle Tennessee to capitalize on the Troy miscue, needing just four plays to push its lead to 14-7 on a 50-yard Kilgore to Sancho McDonald toss down the middle with 8:19 remaining in the period, moving the receiver over 1,000 career receiving yards. The Trojans took their next drive and methodically moved down the field, capping it with an 8-yard Corey Robinson pass to Jaquon Robinson to the back corner of the end zone to tie the score once again, 14-14, with 4:31 left in the half. Troy used 10 plays to cover 68 yards, with the pair started the possession with a 21-yard completion. The Blue Raiders reached pay dirt once more before the half ended on a 37-yard Kilgore to Cunningham screen pass. After the running back caught the ball, he high-stepped out of a tackle before racing down the sideline the remaining yards to give Middle Tennessee a 21-14 edge with 55 seconds left. It came on the 10th play of the drive and provided the second time this season the Blue Raiders led at the break, as neither team scored again the remainder of the stanza. With Troy having the ball first to start the second half, it needed just two plays to tie the score for the third time. The Trojans lost two yards on the first play before a pass interference call moved the ball ahead 15 yards on the next. Corey Robinson then found Eric Thomas for 46 yards uncovered on a play-action pass to make it a 21-21 game with 14:15 to play. Middle Tennessee appeared to be stopped on its initial drive of the frame, when it was facing a fourth-and-four from the Trojan 30-yard line. Needing a conversion to keep the possession alive, Kilgore hit Beyah in-stride as the receiver sprinted between defenders and was not touched on his way across the goal line for a 28-21 Blue Raider advantage at 10:19. Troy did not let up offensively the next time it had the ball, inching closer to another touchdown, before the MT defense again stepped up. The Trojans crossed the 10-yard line, down to the Middle Tennessee 8 on a third-down play, but were stopped short of the end zone. Michael Taylor then came on and kicked a 28-yard field goal with 7:17 remaining to pull the hosts within four, 28-24. The Blue Raiders started the next possession on their own 20 after a touchback. Another third-and-long situation was on deck, but Kilgore connected with Amos on a tip-toed catch near the sideline for 29 yards to extend the drive. Middle Tennessee moved down to the Troy 20-yard line but no further. The Blue Raiders lined up for a field goal, but a delay of game penalty pushed them back five yards. Alan Gendreau then missed the ensuing 42-yard attempt to the right, returning the ball to the Trojans. Troy needed only one play, a 75-yard bomb from Corey Robinson to Chandler Worthy, to claim its first lead of the game, 31-28, with 1:11 to go in the third quarter. The Middle Tennessee offense sputtered early in the fourth frame, not able to advance more than 11 yards before returning the ball back to the Trojans. Troy

then carved up the Blue Raider defense on seven plays, including a 17-yard rush by Shawn Southward and 17 and 16-yard passes from Corey Robinson, before Chris Anderson went around the far right end for an eight-yard touchdown carry at the 10:25 mark. The scoring play increased the Trojan advantage to 10, 38-28. Middle Tennessee made one last run halfway through the fourth quarter. Starting on their own 5-yard line, the Blue Raiders marched 95 yards on nine plays, the last a 34-yard touchdown connection between Kilgore and Amos when the receiver dragged defenders the final 10 yards to trim the deficit to three, 38-35, with 3:18 remaining. Kilgore's scoring toss was his fifth of the game, tying him with Billy Walker's performance Oct. 28, 1967, at UT-Martin for the second most in a game in school history. The redshirt sophomore signal caller also moved into fourth place on the school's single-game charts for passing yards, surpassing the 376 by Wes Counts had against New Mexico State Oct. 27, 2001. The MT defense then stood tall one more time, causing Troy to punt the ball back. The Blue Raiders would start the drive at their own 34-yard line and back-to-back Kilgore strikes to Beyah moved him over 400 yards and into third on the school's single-game passing yards list. Middle Tennessee continued to move the ball, but when it faced a fourth-and-five from the Trojan 35, Kilgore's attempt was tipped and grabbed by Brannon Bryan with 1:39 left, ending any Blue Raider threat. Middle Tennessee will return to action when it plays host to Memphis at 6 p.m. Saturday at Floyd Stadium on Homecoming. **Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:**

FIRST BLOCK OF 2011: Middle Tennessee recorded its first block of the season when it rejected a Troy punt on its opening possession. Walk-on Reginald Farmer was credited with the block which was the first of his career. Since 2008, the Blue Raiders have now blocked 18 kicks which ties Houston for the second most in the nation during that span. Overall, MT has blocked 21 kicks under Rick Stockstill in 66 games.

WHATLEY COMES UP BIG: Redshirt freshman Reggie Whatley scored his first collegiate touchdown in a big way against Troy. The Rome, GA native took a pass 82 yards for the score which went down as the fifth longest pass play in school history. QB Logan Kilgore threw the strike which went down as the longest of his career and bettered his previous long of 62 yards.

McDONALD 3 IN A ROW, OVER 1,000: WR Sancho McDonald went over the 1,000-yard mark for his career when he hauled in a 50-yard TD reception in the second quarter. McDonald, who has now caught a TD pass in three straight games, has 968 career receiving yards.

RARE COMPANY: With Sancho McDonald going over the 1,000-yard mark for receiving yardage he joins teammate Malcolm Beyah in the 1,000 club. The tandem is just the second duo to reach 1,000 yards at Middle Tennessee while playing together. Beyah topped the mark earlier this season.

GENDREAU IS SBC CAREER LEADER: With five extra points against Troy, senior PK Alan Gendreau became the Sun Belt Conference's all-time leader. On his third successful attempt in the first half, Gendreau surpassed Troy's Greg Whibbs who had 134 PATs from 2004 to 2007. Gendreau now has 137 career extra points made.

BIG DAY FOR KILGORE: QB Logan Kilgore recorded his second career 300-yard passing game, and first over 400, when he threw for 415 yards against Troy. Kilgore, who was playing in just his sixth career game, also recorded a personal-best five touchdown passes to best his previous mark of two set against Purdue in the season opener. The five TD passes rank in a tie for second on the MT single-game list, while his 415 yards are the third most in school history. The five scoring tosses came to five different receivers.

CUNNINGHAM TOPS 100: Junior RB Benny Cunningham shouldered most of the rushing load for the Blue Raiders, gaining a career-high 117 yards on 19 carries. It marks the first time in his career he has moved over the century mark.

ALLEN LEADS DEFENSE: LB Craig Allen posted a career-best 10 tackles, including five solo stops, to surpass his previous high of nine set in this year's season opener at Purdue. Among the double-digit tackles was a half-tackle for loss.

QUICK HITTERS: T.L. Edwards recorded his second career interception and the first of the season when he picked off a Troy pass in the first quarter … DE Shubert Bastien recorded his first forced fumble in the second quarter … DT SaCoby Carter made his first collegiate start today in place of Kendall Dangerfield … LB Justin Jones saw his first action of the season following a preseason thumb injury … LB Darin Davis made his team leading 16th straight start today … OT Mike Williams made his team-leading 39th career start today.

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