

Raiders, 'Toppers renew rivalry in Blackout game

Kickoff set for 6:32 PM

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

With one win between them so far in the young season, Middle Tennessee will host Western Kentucky in a game where a win for either team could launch a strong second-half of the 2011 season.

Kickoff is set for 6:32 PM, and will be televised nationally on ESPNU. The game will also be broadcast on the Blue Raider Network with Chip Walters (pxp) and Kelly Holcomb (color analyst) manning the microphones. It will also be available online at ESPN3.com. Web audio and live statistics are also online at GoBlueRaiders.com. Both teams feel strongly that they are better than their records



would indicate. Middle Tennessee (1-3) has lost a pair of road games by three points each, and could easily have won both games. The Blue Raiders fell in the season opener at Purdue 27-24 on a last minute score by the Boilermakers and a blocked field goal on the last play of the game. At Troy, the Trojans scored with 2:17 left to play, and withstood a Blue Raider rally that had Middle Tennessee in position to win or tie the game in the final seconds. Against Memphis last Saturday, the Raiders finally broke through with a Logan Kilgore-led 94-yard drive in seven plays to regain the lead with 11 seconds left in the game for their first win of the season. "I am proud of this team, and the way they came back from 17-0 down in the second quarter," said Blue Raider Head Coach Rick Stockstill. "It says a lot about the resiliency and character of this team. It was a hard-fought win in a physical, 60-minute game." WKU lost late to Arkansas State, who scored the winning touchdown with 43 seconds left to down the 'Toppers 26-22 in Bowling Green. Also, in the season opener, Western fought Kentucky tooth and nail before falling to the Wildcats 14-3 in Nashville. Hilltopper Head Coach Willie Taggart had much the same comment for his team's effort. "Even though we lost, we played a complete game against ASU, and that meant a lot to me personally. After the embarrassing loss to Indiana State, I thought our guys played with pride and energy against ASU. With our guys playing like that, it had us in the ball game with a chance to win at the end." So both

teams will step on Horace Jones Field Thursday night to see which one can release a lot of early-season frustration. Based on previous performances this season, the game should feature the high-octane, up-tempo offense of Middle Tennessee, led by sophomore Logan Kilgore vs. the potent running game of Western, led by senior Bobby Rainey. Kilgore has thrown for 1,139 yards and 10 touchdowns against only four interceptions. MT is second in the Sun Belt Conference in total offense behind Kilgore's 291 yards per game. The Blue Raider ground attack, averaging 160.3 yards a game, took over the Sun Belt Conference lead in that category this week. Behind Rainey's league-leading 106.8 per game, Western is 5th at 132.6 ypg. On the other side of the ball, neither defense is where it wants to be. Having played two of the top offensive teams in the nation in Georgia Tech and Troy, the Blue Raiders are 8th in total defense, and 9th against the run. WKU, with a strong effort against Kentucky, is second in pass defense, but 8th in rushing defense. Hilltopper sophomore linebacker Andrew Jackson has been a terror so far this season, with four consecutive games with at least ten tackles, including 13 stops in each of his last two games. He leads the SBC in both tackles and tackles for loss. Both coaches voiced a lot of respect for the other team's leading offensive threat. "Bobby Rainey is an excellent player. He carried the ball more than 40 times against us last year. We didn't do a good job of tackling him last year, and we need to do a better job on Thursday. He breaks tackles and extends runs. We have to get a lot of helmets around him. We knew he was a great running back, but he's also proved he is a very capable receiver coming out of the backfield," noted Stockstill. Taggart was equally impressed with Kilgore. "He's a good quarterback. He gets rid of the ball, and has some talent around him to get the ball out. He is really accurate with the football, and has some really good anticipation in throwing it, which really makes him a threat. He's up there in the 60 percent range (in completions) and that's pretty good throwing the football as much as they do." Blue Raider fans hope that senior placekicker Alan Gendreau continues to regain the form that made him the All-SBC placekicker the last two years. Gendreau hit his first two field goals of the season last week vs. Memphis, and Stockstill noted that he has had two good weeks of practice. The rivalry between the two schools is the equal of any in the Sun Belt, in all sports. Taggart wants his team to make it an even bigger rivalry. "Middle Tennessee does not like us, and we do not like them, and that is good for our conference. It is good to have that rivalry, and to be able to get excited to go out and take care of our business. But we have to make it a rivalry. They have beaten us the last three games, and we have to make it a rivalry by beating them. Here is our opportunity on Thursday night to see if we can go do that." The game will also provide the backdrop for the 55th Anniversary reunion of the 1956 Middle Tennessee Refrigerator Bowl team, the first football team that was invited to play in the postseason. Among those expected to be on hand are Sid Corban, Jim Dunlap, Carlton Galbreath, Hester Gibbs, Roy Hall, Tillman Harris, Jerry Kemp, Ralph Massey, Don Plonk, Frank Thomason, Richard Wagster, John Waldrop, Tommy Wilson, and Ken Shipp (B Team coach). The Blue Raider network will broadcast the MT-WKU game live on Murfreesboro flagship stations WMOT-FM 89.5 AND WGNS AM 1450, and also on WGNS's sister FM stations, 100.5 and 101.9. The Nashville flagship station is WNSR AM-560.

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