Raiders, Cajuns clash on Saturday

Game to be shown live on SBN at 6:30 PM

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - While Middle Tennessee's football team is tied for sixth place in the Sun Belt Conference standings, the Blue Raiders have a golden opportunity to take a giant step forward when 6-2 Louisiana-Lafayette visits Floyd Stadium Saturday night at 6:30 PM. Coming off perhaps their most complete outing of the season, a 38-14 drubbing of Florida Atlantic in Boca Raton last week, the Blue Raiders are primed to make a run for the top. The Ragin' Cajuns, on the other hand, were stunned by Western Kentucky, 42-23, last week for their first Sun Belt loss of the season. That leaves Middle Tennessee only one game behind ULL in the loss side of the ledger in Sun Belt Conference action. Approaching the game from two different mind-sets, but with one common goal, UL and Middle Tennessee will battle on Saturday night to improve their position in the Sun Belt race, and perhaps stay alive for a spot in one of the two SBC- affiliated bowl games. The game will be televised live on the Sun Belt Network on CSS (Ch. 27 locally), with Joe Davis handling play-by-play, Cole Cubelic handling game analysis and Erin Cofiell reporting from the sidelines. Live broadcast of the game may be heard over the Blue Raider Network with veteran Chip Walters (play-by-play) and former Blue Raider quarterback Kelly Holcomb (color analysis) manning the microphones. Both live statistics and web audio are available at GoBlueRaiders.com. The 12 game series between the Raiders and the Cajuns has been a dandy, with the visiting team winning as much as the home team. The two teams have split the 12 previous games, 6-6, with each team winning three and losing three at home. Two of the most memorable games in Middle Tennessee football history have been played here in Murfreesboro, with the Blue Raiders taking a 41-38 victory in two overtimes in 2000 to gain a 6-5 season, their first in their brief FBS history. ULL returned the favor three years later, ending the season for both teams with a 57-51 win in four OTs. Last year, behind the arm of Logan Kilgore, the Blue Raiders won 34-14 in Lafayette. Kilgore will once again be at the helm of the high-powered up-temp offense that Middle Tennessee likes to run. For UL, both Chris Masson and Blaine Gautier played quarterback for the Cajuns last fall, with Masson getting the bulk of the playing time. This season, however, Gautier has been the trigger-man for the hot start enjoyed by Louisiana-Lafayette. Defensively, the Ragin' Cajuns have improved greatly, leading the Sun Belt with ten interceptions so far, and leading the nation with five of those being returned for touchdowns. When you consider that one of those games was against 4th-ranked Oklahoma State, and QB Dan Weeden, their stats are even more impressive. Middle Tennessee Head Coach Rick Stockstill noted that the visitors have a real good football team, and that their six-game winning streak was by far the

longest in the Sun Belt this season. “Gautier has thrown 12 touchdown passes, with only two interceptions. They have a big offensive line with huge tackles, and are pretty balanced in their running and throwing. They have a dynamic tight end (Ladarius Green) and their receivers are as good as anybody we’ve faced.” Stockstill said that UL will bring more pressure, defensively, than FAU did. “They are very multiple in their coverages, and they are athletic. Their front guys can run, their linebackers are athletic, their secondary is a very experienced group, and their kicking game is sound. “It will be a heck of a good football game, and we are looking forward to it.” Kilgore is second in the Sun Belt in passing, and third in total offense, and has thrown 15 touchdown passes, the most in the league. Against FAU last week, he completed his first 19 passes for a new school record, and guided the Blue Raiders to 21-0 first quarter lead that let them control the game after that. His favorite targets are Malcolm Beyah, Sancho McDonald, Anthony Amos, Tavarres Jefferson and Reggie Whatley. This quintet has caught 107 passes for 1,265 yards and 13 TDs. The Blue Raiders also feature a potent running attack that leads the Sun Belt with 171.3 yards per game. With Benny Cunningham and D.D. Kyles still ailing, the load will fall on sophomores William Pratcher and Kyle Griswould. The duo responded for 160 yards and two touchdowns at FAU. While giving credit to the skill positions, Stockstill was quick to praise the veteran offensive line of the Blue Raiders. “Our offensive line is playing at a high level, they have been good in pass protection, and they have given up only five sacks all year, and one of them was last week on a three-step drop that was really on the quarterback. The fact that we have two running backs out and are still leading the league in rushing is a direct reflection on the O-line.” Defensively, Stockstill pointed out a couple of areas of improvement. “We tackled well against FAU. We had some really good, physical, violent tackles. I think we had one missed tackle for the whole game, which is pretty incredible. So we are playing better. We were better on 3rd down against FAU than we have been in previous games. If you are good on 3rd down’s, and don’t give up big plays, you have a chance to be successful on defense.” As far as the kicking game is concerned, the two teams are about equal, with the Blue Raiders holding a one-yard average edge overall in punting, while UL leads in kick scoring, 8.6 ppg to Middle Tennessee’s 6.5 ppg average. Looking for a high-scoring contest? It could well be, with Middle Tennessee (31.5 ppg) and ULL (31.1 ppg) ranking first and second in the Sun Belt. Fans tuning in to the Blue Raider network to listen to the game can find it on Murfreesboro flagship stations WMOT-FM 89.5, WGNS AM 1450, and their FM affiliates 100.5 and 101.9. The Nashville flagship station is WNSR 560 AM.

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