Blue Raiders fall to in-state foe Tennessee

Turnovers prove costly for MT

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee fell behind early to the Tennessee Volunteers and never recovered, dropping a 24-0 decision at Neyland Stadium in front of 88,211 fans on Saturday evening. Turnovers proved costly for the Blue Raiders, as the Vols had three takeaways. Quarterback Jeff Murphy came off the bench and went 14-of-21 for 108 yards with one interception. Murphy relieved Logan Kilgore in the second quarter, as Kilgore finished the contest 4-of-10 for 25 yards with one interception. Tavarres Jefferson was the top receiver for MT, hauling in four catches for 28 yards, and William Pratcher led the Blue Raiders on the ground with 12 rushes for 37 yards. Arness Ikner paced the Blue Raiders defensively with 10 tackles, while Eric Russell collected nine tackles, including three for a loss. After the two teams traded quick opening possessions, MT began the next drive at its own 20, but the possession didn't last long as Kilgore's first pass attempt was intercepted by Vol linebacker Austin Johnson on 29 the yardline. Johnson's return of 22 yards set up the Vols' first score of the game, a one-yard rush by tailback Tauren Poole to give Tennessee the 7-0 lead with 9:05 to play in the first quarter. Although the Blue Raiders managed a pair of first downs on the ensuing possession, the drive stalled at the Tennessee 42 and MT was forced to punt. Punter Nathaniel Toulson pinned the Vols on their own 11, but Tennessee drove 89 yards on seven plays for the Vols' second score of the quarter. After the Vols converted a third and one on the MT 48 yardline, quarterback Justin Worley heaved a 47-yard touchdown pass to Da'Rick Rogers to cap off the scoring drive and give Tennessee a 14-0 advantage with 2:24 remaining in the opening quarter. Poole spun into the endzone for the second time in the contest on a seven-yard rush after the Vols marched 86 yards down the field. Tennessee

chewed up 7:52 off the clock on 15 plays for the 21-0 lead with 7:39 left in the half. Murphy entered the contest with 5:08 to play in the first half, but the Blue Raider offense again failed to pick up a first down on the possession, punting back to the Vols with 3:42 until the break. After a defensive stand thanks in part to linebacker Leighton Gasque's sack of Worley on a third and eight, MT took over on its own 24 with 1:39 to go before halftime. Murphy completed three consecutive passes and picked up a first down, but the fourth pass attempt proved costly as the ball went straight into the hands of Vol defensive back Eric Gordon for the Blue Raiders' second turnover of the contest. Tennessee capitalized on the turnover as time expired in the half, quickly going 38 yards and ending the drive with a Derrick Brodus 21-yard field goal to give the Vols a 24-0 lead at the half. The Blue Raiders responded with a solid second-half opening, forcing the Vols into a three-and-out then putting together their longest drive of the contest. MT drove 52 yards on 11 plays, highlighted by Pratcher's 11-yard rush on a third and six. But the drive stalled at the Tennessee 15 after Murphy's pass on fourth and five fell incomplete. The Blue Raiders made their way deep into Tennessee territory again midway through the fourth quarter. Pratcher and Reggie Whatley combined for 42 rushing yards on the drive, coupled with a 16-yard pass from Murphy to Jefferson as the Blue Raiders worked their way to the Vol 23. Another turnover halted the drive and MT's scoring opportunity and sealed Tennessee's shutout victory. **Middle Tennessee Postgame Notes:**

SACK MAN: Freshman Leighton Gasque recorded his team-leading sixth sack late in the second quarter when he dropped UT's Justin Worley. The six sacks now tie for the seventh-most in a single-season at MT. Gasque, who only plays on definite third down passing situations, now has at least one sack in four straight games.

BEYAH PASSES MOSTILLER, OWENBY: With three receptions against Tennessee, Malcolm Beyah moved past Demetric Mostiller and Herbert Owenby for fifth place on the all-time list. Beyah now has 112 career receptions and needs five more to pass Patrick Honeycutt for fourth.

KILGORE CRACKS TOP 10: With 25 passing yards against Tennessee, QB Logan Kilgore cracked the single-season top 10 list for passing yardage. Kilgore now has 1,894 yards this season to rank 10th. He needs 24 more yards to overtake Clint Marks for ninth place.

QUICK HITTERS: MT was shutout for the first time since 2007 when LSU defeated MT 44-0 … In two games at Neyland Stadium, MT has never scored a touchdown … Sophomore Sammy Seamster made his first career start tonight at safety in place of senior Derrick Crumpton … The Blue Raiders fell to 3-30 all-time against teams from the SEC … Head Coach Rick Stockstill fell to 5-2 against in-state opponents during his tenure … MT is now 9-3 in November games since 2008 … MT lost the opening coin toss tonight for the 15th time in the last 21 games … OL Mike Williams made his 44th career start tonight to lead all current Blue Raiders … MT now has 13 turnovers in its last four games

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