Blue Raiders try to close 2011 on high note

Stockstill announces permanent captains

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - In a season that has not reached its high expectations and goals, Middle Tennessee will travel to Denton, Texas for the final game of the 2011 football season on Saturday afternoon looking to close the slate on a high note against the North Texas Mean Green. The game, slated for a 3:00 PM start in brand new Apogee Stadium on the NTU campus, will be broadcast live over the Blue Raider Network with Chip Walters doing the play-by-play, and former MTSU and NFL quarterback Kelly Holcomb providing the color commentary. The game will not be televised, but live audio will be available on GoBlueRaiders.com, and live stats may be obtained at MeanGreen.com. Twitter updates are available @mtathletics. On Thursday, Head Coach Rick Stockstill announced the permanent team captains as selected by the players. This year's four captains are OL Colin Boss, RB Marquise Branton, CB Arness Ikner, and S Derrick Crumpton. The permanent captain award is the ultimate honor in the Blue Raider program. "Like I always have said this is the ultimate honor when your teammates make you a permanent captain for the season," said Stockstill. "These four guys have meant a lot to this program and all four are very deserving. It's not just your play on the field but the way you conduct yourself off the field and how you lead and push your teammates. When your peers give you a vote for the way you practice every day and compete on the field and in the classroom there is not a better honor out there." Stockstill believes that a win at North Texas would be a big boost for his Blue Raiders going into the off-season. "Whether it's high school, college, or pro, you remember your last game. Winning this game won't make our overall season feel any better, but we'll be happy if we win. I think that how you play your last game will affect how you go into your off-season. "We are looking forward to it. It is the last one for our seniors, and hopefully, we will play our best game of the season Saturday

afternoon." Stockstill singled out quarterbacks Jeff Murphy and Logan Kilgore, who have split playing time in the last four games, and who will both return next year. "I think it is critical that both of these guys play well against North Texas, that they end the season with some good things happening to them," Stockstill noted. Kilgore, who engineered two long scoring drives against FIU last week, will get the start. Continuing to develop this young team will be one of the goals for the Blue Raiders, and Stockstill is anxious to see if some of the players who have come on strong lately can continue to progress. Injuries to key personnel have taken a toll on the team, especially in the last half of the season, but Stockstill notes that there is a bright side to the situation. On offense, wide receiver Kyle Griswould and offensive linemen Micah James and Isaiah Anderson drew praise from Stockstill. "Kyle had just started to learn the wide receiver position, and then we had to move him to running back when both Benny Cunningham and D.D. Kyles got hurt. Then when Benny came back two weeks ago, Kyle moved back to wide receiver. We hope he will have another good game this week to build on what he has already learned," said Stockstill. "And the same goes for the two offensive linemen who will start for the second week in a row." Injuries at defensive end have seen one true freshman replace another freshman, as Shubert Bastien will start in place of Jiajuan Fennell. Sophomore Sammy Seamster will see a lot more action with senior Derrick Crumpton possibly out at safety. Linebacker has been a revolving door all season with assorted injuries. "Playing well against North Texas will raise the confidence level of all of these young guys going into spring practice." The series between the two schools, which coincided with the beginning of the Sun Belt Conference ten years ago, has been a series of streaks. North Texas upset the unbeaten Blue Raiders in Denton 24-21 in 2001 to start a five game winning streak against MT. When Stockstill arrived in 2006, his teams reversed the trend and won four in a row, all of them by margins of at least two touchdowns. The Mean Green upset the Blue Raiders 23-17 last season in Murfreesboro to stop their streak and maintain a 6-4 edge in the series entering Saturday's game. Perhaps the most memorable game, at least for Blue Raider fans, was the game in Murfreesboro in 2008, when Dallas native Phillip Tanner scored six touchdowns in a 52-13 rout. Tanner now plays for the Dallas Cowboys. Middle Tennessee, under Stockstill, has never lost in Denton, but the challenge presented by the Mean Green offense, and all-conference running back Lance Dunbar, will be huge. Dunbar needs 89 yards rushing in his final game to become only the sixth player in NCAA history to have 4,000 yards rushing and 1,000 yards receiving in his career. He is the only player in Sun Belt Conference history on that list. The Mean Green also has a breakaway threat on special teams in Brelan Chancellor, who returns both punts and kickoffs. North Texas is 3-2 in their new stadium, with their first win being 24-21 over Big Ten foe Indiana. Those fans listening to the Blue Raider Network for the live broadcast of the game will have a choice of local outlets. The Nashville flagship station is WNSR 560 AM, while the Murfreesboro flagships are WGNS 1450 AM and WMOT-FM 89.5. The WGNS FM affiliates are 100.5 and 101.9.

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