

# Blue Raiders open spring drills Saturday

## 41 lettermen and 12 starters return

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### MURFREESBORO, Tenn. –

Middle Tennessee will return to the gridiron on March 17 for the start of spring drills as three new coaches make their debut. Saturday's practice will begin at 10:55 AM inside Floyd Stadium. The Blue Raiders will practice on March 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 30, and 31, and will hit the field in April on the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 10th, 12th, and 14th. The Blue-White Spring Game is set for April 14 at 1 PM. All practices will be held at Floyd Stadium.

"I am excited about the start of practice and getting on the field," said Head Coach Rick Stockstill. "I like what our staff has accomplished since signing day in implementing our schemes. Spring practice is fun because you get to work more in depth with a lot of guys for the first time. We are able to concentrate on fundamentals and experiment with different schemes to see

how they fit with our personnel. We are all ready to get started." Middle Tennessee returns 41 lettermen, including six starters on offense and six starters on defense while new coaches Tyrone Nix (co-defensive coordinator), Matt Moore (offensive tackles), and Glen Elarbee (offensive guards/centers) hit the field for the first time. Offensively, the Blue Raiders welcome back 18 lettermen and six starters including signal-caller Logan Kilgore, running back Benny Cunningham, receivers Anthony Amos and Tavarres Jefferson, and linemen Alex Stuart and Josh Walker. Kilgore leads an offensive unit that became just the second in school history to throw for more than 3,000 yards in a single-season. However, it also struggled with turnovers and converting short yardage situations which will be a point of emphasis this spring. Cunningham paces a rushing attack that has great potential with LSU transfer Drayton Calhoun and William Pratcher providing depth. Cunningham missed four games a year ago with an injury while Calhoun sat on the sidelines



because of NCAA transfer rules. Pratcher enjoyed a career year with a personal-best and team-leading 585 rushing yards. Up front, the offense lost four players who accounted for 162 total starts but Coach Stockstill and his staff feels good about the guys ready to take over. Stuart and Walker are returning starters and Jadareius Hamlin and Isaiah Anderson have both started games during their careers. The Blue Raiders are also bringing in two junior college players for added depth. Despite losing two receivers who ended their careers ranked in the top 10 all-time in receptions, Stockstill likes the returning group and expects big things in 2012. Leading receiver Jefferson is back after a career year and Amos and Kyle Griswold are proven performers. Defensively, Middle Tennessee returns 22 lettermen and six starters while six others also saw starting time. All four starters on the defensive line are back with Omar McLendon, Jiajuan Fennell, Kendall Dangerfield, and Jimmy Staten. Roderic Blunt is the lone returning starter at linebacker while Kenneth Gilstrap is the only one from the secondary. The Blue Raiders had to play too many first-time starters on the defensive side in 2011 which resulted in missed assignments, only 19 forced turnovers, and zero points. With an added year of experience and a group that stays healthy, expect to see much improvement on that side of the ball. "The theme of our offseason and spring practice is toughness," added Stockstill. "We started with the weight room and mat drills, now I want it to move to the field. Our focus is to play with relentless effort, play fast, and develop a high level of toughness. As always, we will also work on cutting down our turnovers and forcing more. We have to be better in that area." Due to offseason surgeries and recent injuries, the following players will be out or limited during spring practice: Lance Campbell (OL/Out), J.D. Jones (DL/Out), Jamar Brown (WR/Limited), Marcus Robinson (DL/Limited), and Stephen Roberts (LB/Limited). Also, offensive lineman Judd Hunt will have shoulder surgery this week and his practice status will be determined in 7-10 days. **Spring Practice Schedule**

March 17 (10:55 AM)

March 18 (4:15 PM)

March 20 (3:15 PM)

March 23 (4:00 PM)

March 24 (10:45 AM)

March 27 (3:15 PM)

March 30 (4:00 PM)

March 31 (TBA)

April 3 (3:15 PM)

April 5 (TBA)

April 6 (4:00 PM)

April 7 (3:15 PM)

April 10 (3:15 PM)

April 12 (3:15 PM)

April 14 (1:00 PM)

#### **Other Dates**

March 22: Pro Day

April 13: Lettermen Golf Tournament