Brock excited about his stable of running backs

Cunningham leads talented group

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While Coach Brent Brock has been on the football staff at Middle Tennessee for the past seven years, he will be in his first full season of coaching the Blue Raider running backs this fall. He has one of the most experienced areas on the team with talented returnees in Benny Cunningham and William Pratcher, plus highly-touted transfers Drayton Calhoun and Jeremiah Bryson. Brock began coaching the running backs in mid-season last fall as part of the staff realignment in the wake of the departure of Coach Willie Simmons, who had served as Offensive Coordinator and running backs coach. Brock has 25 years of high school coaching experience in addition to his stint at Middle Tennessee. He also played in the offensive line for four seasons at Florida State under Coach Bobby Bowden, with three of the seasons ending in bowl games. He gives his perspective on several aspects of his duties in the following interview with GoBlueRaiders.com:

At Florida State, you played in the offensive line and you also coached it in high school. Knowing that position well, as both a coach and a player, does that give you any added insight into coaching running backs?"I think it does. The only thing that suffers when you specialize in a position is sometimes you don't learn the little tidbits or the major fundamentals of other positions. But once you are a coach, you learn the tricks of the trade at that position. Part of coaching the offensive line is knowing what the running backs need to be looking at as the play develops. I coached running backs a couple of years in high school, and then when I became an offensive coordinator, I learned a whole lot more about the "Big Picture". And when I became a

head coach, I learned even more about that picture. “It has been some help to me having coached the offensive line, but I think the thing that has helped me the most is 25 years of coaching in high school. You learn a whole lot doing that.” **You have a couple of good running backs returning this fall that Blue Raider fans are familiar with in senior Benny Cunningham and junior William Pratcher, plus a couple of newcomers. One of them is speedster Drayton Calhoun, who will be a junior. How has he impressed you in the spring?** “He is everything we thought he would be when he transferred here, not only as a football player, but a person. There is no question that he has a lot of talent, he is a ‘team’ person, and was a pleasure to coach in the spring. He is a good running back. He fits into the package of what we are trying to accomplish in the running back situation. All three of them bring different things to the table. We moved Jeremiah Bryson, a red-shirt freshman, back to running back late in the spring, and he brings another dimension as well.” **Cunningham was the heart of the running attack last year, and one of the leaders on the team. When he went down with an injury in mid-season, it seemed like the air went out of the balloon, so to speak. Is that too strong a statement?**“No, I don’t think so. You don’t ever want to make excuses, but when Benny went down, we had established a good running game, Logan (Kilgore) was having a great year up to that point, D.D (Kyles) was having a good year and then he got hurt, as well. (William) Pratcher came in and did an outstanding job of doing what he could to help us move the ball, but when Benny went down, it took an area of our offense away. Us dictating running and throwing, or throwing and running, all of a sudden did not exist. Our opponents knew that, and they could sit back and take some throwing lanes away from Logan, and dared us to run the football. That won’t happen this year; we have plenty of good running backs.” **As a running backs coach, are you a little concerned about the lack of experience in the offensive line, having lost four mainstays with well over 40 starts each?**“I am not concerned at all. I’ve been in this business 31 years, and people graduate and people get hurt. As a coach, if you start worrying about another position, you are not doing your job; you are not in the boat. The shoe could just as easily be on the other foot, where they had the experience and we didn’t. One offsets the other. The amount of minutes that our running backs have will help that offensive line get through some growing pains. I am not concerned at all about our two new coaches. Coach (Glen) Elarbee and Coach (Matt) Moore are about as good as I’ve been around. They are going to have those guys ready to play. When one position is inexperienced, sometimes you have to overcompensate and help that position grow up, so it is not a concern of mine at all.” **Is Benny back to 100 percent now from his foot injuries?**“I think he is close. He went thru the spring worried about one foot, and then when all was said and done, we had to do the other foot, too. To hear Robbie Stewart talk, he has progressed better than he did with the first foot injury. Is he 100 percent? I would probably say ‘No’, because it’s like anything else in this day and time, it is going to be that first move, that first cut. Benny says he feels better, we have done some things to correct the problem, and with the attitude he has, he will do everything he can to get healthy and stay healthy.” **Toughness has become an emphasis in the Blue Raider camp this season. Talk about that.** “In the off-season, we talked more about getting downhill. Our whole emphasis all spring was to get downhill, to get vertical, move the chains, go ‘old-school’, move the pile, and be tough. The finesse part and athleticism will take care of itself. There were times last year when we didn’t think we put our foot in the ground and got where we needed to be. We were trying to be a little too cute sometimes. Our offensive mindset now is to be tougher both mentally and physically, and you will be surprised what will happen when you are tougher than your opponent snap after snap.” **Is there anything else that you would like to add?** “I want to say that I am very fortunate that this group ‘adopted’ me. When we went through what we went through last year, I have a lot of respect for what they had to deal with, not only injuries, but the relationship they had with Coach Simmons. At the same time, they adopted me and took me

under their wings, and I am very appreciative of that. I think they know that Coach Brock has their best interests, just like Coach Simmons did, just like Coach Stockstill does. I am very fortunate to coach a good group and I am excited about the season ahead."

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