Faulkner excited about offensive changes

Kilgore, Cunningham set to lead unit

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Buster Faulkner is in his second year coaching the quarterbacks and being the passing game coordinator for the Blue Raiders, but over the winter, Head Coach Rick Stockstill made him the team's offensive coordinator as well. Faulkner is no stranger to that coaching area, having served as the OC at both Murray State and Valdosta State prior to coming to Middle Tennessee. In his year as OC at Valdosta State his offense averaged 381 yards per game in advancing to the quarterfinals of the Division II playoffs. At Murray State in 2010, Faulkner took over an offense that was ranked 115th in the FCS the year before and molded them into a unit that broke 27 school records and led the FCS in total plays, pass completions and completion percentage. His offense also produced the only game in FCS history that had a 500-yard passer, a 200-yard rusher and a 200-yard receiver. GoBlueRaiders.com talked with Faulkner about the upcoming 2012 season, and what new things to look for in the Blue Raider offense.

GBR.com: As the quarterbacks coach, you enter the season with one healthy, proven quarterback, one gimpy but experienced quarterback and an untested red-shirt freshman. Talk about that situation.

FAULKNER: You have to feel better going into this season than you did last year because you have a quarterback that started nine or ten games last season and played a lot of football. If Jeff (Murphy) is healthy, he provides a solid, solid backup to Logan Kilgore, and hopefully he will be able to give us something this season. And Shaun (White) showed a lot of promise in the spring and we are excited about what he brings to the table. Logan is our starting quarterback because he's earned it. He'll get most of the reps, and we'll have the others ready when their number is called.

GBR.com: If Jeff Murphy can't go, will Shaun White be the backup?

FAULKNER: Shaun will be the back-up if Jeff Murphy is unable to play. Shaun earned that in the

spring. We've also got Cameron Deen who came in and he will have a chance to compete for that spot, too. We'll let them battle it out, and you never know who it will be.

GBR.com: What is the prognosis on Jeff Murphy as we head toward fall camp?

FAULKNER: He is not going to have surgery. He knows it is his last year of football and he's going to give it everything he's got. I respect him for that decision, and we are glad that he's going to do that and give it a go.

GBR.com: As the Offensive Coordinator, you fully understand the value of a balanced offense. Talk about the effect on the team last fall when Benny Cunningham was hurt and missed the last half of the season.

FAULKNER: It is always tough when you lose a player of Benny's caliber. The bottom line this year will be "No Excuses", no reason why you don't do what you are supposed to do. Anytime you lose a guy like Benny, there is no question that it hampers you a little. He is a home run threat and can score from anywhere. It's what you lose every day at practice, the leadership, the strong character. That's probably what we missed more than anything. We look forward to getting him back this year.

GBR.com: Just from watching spring practice, we appear to have more depth at running back this year.

FAULKNER: No question about it. We are excited about the depth in the backfield this year. Drayton Calhoun should be a really, really good addition. He is a transfer from LSU who red-shirted last year. He is a home run threat, a great kid, comes to work every day, and we are excited about him. Then there is William Pratcher, who came in and played some really good football last season, he gives you everything he's got, and we are happy that he's a part of this football team. Jeremiah Bryson is another one that will carry the football, and you'll see him in various roles. We are not afraid to put any of them in there at any time.

GBR.com: Talk about the changes that were made to add power to the running game.

FAULKNER: The biggest thing is the addition of Matt Moore and Glen Elarbee as offensive line coaches. We are excited about those two guys, and the intensity they bring on a daily basis. We are going to try to be more vertical in our run game. We are going to put our emphasis on lining up and being able to get those two or three yards when we need it. And that comes with practice. You'll see it with the quarterback under center some with tight ends and a fullback.

GBR.com: in addition to more personal attention, what other advantages are there to having two offensive line coaches?

FAULKNER: Any time you can get more eyes on a position, I think it helps, especially with their background and experience. They have come together and really meshed.

GBR.com: Will this year be more of a "Buster Faulkner style" offense?

FAULKNER: It will definitely be different than what you saw last year. We'll use personnel groups, things like that. Yes, it will be a lot different. All of the offensive coaches sat down and ironed this

thing out exactly like we wanted it, and we are excited about it.

GBR.com: The incoming class of recruits, were they specifically recruited for this type of offense?

FAULKNER: Yes they were. We will still be spread offense most of the time, but we are going to have the ability to use tight ends and fullbacks, things of that nature to be able to mix it up more, and you'll see a more balanced offense.

GBR.com: I recall hearing an offensive coordinator once make the statement that "if the opponents set their defense based on what they think they see from our offense, we will beat them every time." Is that a valid statement? And if so, how much deception will be in our offense?

FAULKNER: That is an absolutely correct statement. You will definitely see some deception in the offense. You have to use some smoke and mirrors. And a lot of that is based on personnel, and what they can and can't do. What we are going to take great pride in is what our kids can do. We are going to try to put them in great situations. We want them to have a lot of confidence in what we are trying to do as an offense. We'll use a little deception, but at the end of the day, the game of football is all about lining up and beating the man across from you.

GBR.com: At this point, coming out of spring and headed toward fall camp this week, what area pleases you the most, and what area concerns you the most?

FAULKNER: One thing we have to find is more depth at receiver. We'll have some guys playing new positions, but we'll have to add some depth there. And the same thing in the offensive line. The most encouraging thing is our backfield because we do have the most depth there. We have to find different ways to get those guys the ball.

GBR.com: What differences in our offense should the fans watch for?

FAULKNER: The first thing they will be able to pick out is our short-yardage, goal line packages. Also, our run game is going to be more vertical. It won't be as much side to side. That should be a big plus for us. They will see fullbacks and tight ends coming on and off the field, it won't be four wide receivers every snap.

GBR.com: Will you call plays from the press box or the field?

FAULKNER: I will call them from the press box because of the better overall perspective, but all five of us on offense, plus Coach Stock, will be on the headsets all the time. All of them can hear me, and each coach has a different responsibility. Coach Moore and Coach Elarbee will always be ready to let me know what we need to run, and Coach Watts and myself are always on the same page, we work on the game plan from the passing standpoint together, and we are on the same page as to how the whole thing should be run.

GBR.com: Counting this season as your first as Offensive Coordinator here at Middle Tennessee, and given the tremendous success you had at both Murray State and Valdosta State, will this be your biggest challenge?

FAULKNER: I look at everything as a challenge. I love a challenge. We've got great kids, we've made a lot of changes. Last year was very humbling for all of us. It was no one person's fault, but as a coach, if you love it as much as I do, you take what happened last year as your fault. We are not going to blame it on the kids, I'll take the blame for it, and we are going to get it right this year.

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