Weekly football camp notebook

Debut of the "Burnette Blog"

August 9, 2012 · @MTAthletics

GRADUATES: Middle Tennessee will have five football players earn their degrees this Saturday as the University will hold its Summer Commencement. Current players Logan Kilgore, Drayton Calhoun, and Vincent Van Horne will all pick up their degrees along with former players Tyler Mason and Jesse Kirkland. Congratulations Blue Raiders!

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR BUSTER FALKNER ON THE OFFENSE: We are extremely excited right now over the progress we have made from the spring with our running game, but we have to get better. We are not running the ball anywhere close to where we need to be, but I think we are running the ball better, establishing the line of scrimmage, and that is where we need to continue to improve.

Our pass receiving has met our expectations so far. We've got some guys that have made some plays, and like I told our quarterbacks, we've got a couple of them that all you have to do is get it in their area code, and they will go up and make a play for us. That's what they have to do.

Nobody has really surprised me among the receivers. The whole group is working hard and they are a great group to be around each day. They are competing, but they still need to come out every day with the mindset of getting better. Each of them has a role, a certain skill set, and we have to utilize them but I like their direction.

Benny Cunningham is back running the ball downhill and is healthy, so is newcomer Drayton Calhoun. William Pratcher came in last year and played some big games for us so I have no problem handing him the football. You have Jordan Parker, a freshman, who has impressed, and Jeremiah Bryson, who can really run the ball, and so can Reggie Whatley. So we'll find a way to get the right guys back there and put the ball in their hands.

CO-DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR STEVE ELLIS: Our first week was based on conditioning and assignments. This week, the emphasis is on toughness. Everything they do will be under a microscope. It's a tough, tough week. Everything is about bloodying somebody's nose.

As I mentioned, nothing they ever do will be good enough, but there are some that have stepped up. Kenneth Gilstrap is really coming back from the injury he had two years ago, and he's showing the promise that he showed as a freshman. Kevin Byard is doing a great job as a red-shirt freshman coming into a starting role at safety. I am really intrigued about James Roberson, a red-shirt freshman linebacker/defensive back that is doing a really, really nice job for us. Christian Henry, a red-shirt sophomore linebacker is leading the linebackers and impressing everyone. I also think that Ykeem Wells (red-shirt freshman linebacker) is having an outstanding camp. I believe the sky's the limit for him.

COACH ELLIS LOOKS ACROSS THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE: Going against the Blue Raider offense on every down in practice, Ellis has had great opportunities to evaluate what is happening on the other side of the ball.....and he is very impressed with some of the receivers and newcomers. Ellis had high praise for running back Drayton Calhoun, a transfer from LSU, as well as wide receivers Anthony Amos and Kyle Griswould, but he saved his top accolades for tight end Jacob Corbaley, a 6-3, 240-pound bruiser from Butte Junior College.

> "Our guys noticed him on film real quick, No. 83. They've learned that if they have to go against him, they'd better buckle their chin straps twice, because he's going to come after you."

"He is really tough, a hard-nosed kid that loves contact. He just loves to play football. He has been a really pleasant surprise to me. Our guys noticed him on film real quick, No. 83. They've learned that if they have to go against him, they'd better buckle their chin straps twice, because he's going to come after you."

SIX QUESTIONS WITH ... OL JOSH WALKER
Who is your favorite athlete? Warren Sapp
What song are you listening to the most on your IPod? Quiet by Goochie Man
If you could pick one person to follow you on twitter, who would it be? Orlando Pace
Who would represent the team the best on Dancing with the Stars? Arthur Williams
What is the last movie you saw in the theater? "Ted"
Where is your favorite place to eat in Murfreesboro? Camino Real

SIX QUESTIONS WITH ... P JOSH DAVIS
Who is your favorite athlete? Tim Tebow
What song are you listening to the most on your IPod? Zone Out by KB
If you could pick one person to follow you on twitter, who would it be? Tim Tebow
Who would represent the team the best on Dancing with the Stars? Craig Allen
What is the last movie you saw in the theater? Batman: Dark Knight II
Where is your favorite place to eat in Murfreesboro? Jim & Nick's Barbecue

SIX QUESTIONS WITH ... DE OMAR MCLENDON
Who is your favorite athlete? DeMarcus Ware
What song are you listening to the most on your IPod? I listen to all kinds of music
If you could pick one person to follow you on twitter, who would it be? Oprah Winfrey
Who would represent the team the best on Dancing with the Stars? Craig Allen
What is the last movie you saw in the theater? Batman: "Ted"
Where is your favorite place to eat in Murfreesboro? Jefferson's

THE BURNETTE BLOG: PRACTICE 6 IN THE BOOKS *by Chris Burnette*

The tenacity of the Blue Raider defense has come alive over the last practice and a half. Beginning about mid-day Tuesday during practice 5, the defense seemed to find a rhythm that it was lacking during the first few days of camp. This seems to be in large part to the personality and coaching philosophies of Co-Defensive Coordinators Tyrone Nix and Steve Ellis. Coach Nix, who primarily controls the front seven and specifically the linebackers, has his guys hungry for the football. This became evident for the first time Wednesday during the Team (11-on-11) Blitz period toward the end of practice. The defense repeatedly ran blitzes to learn the right techniques and gap responsibilities while giving the offense a chance to feel comfortable with added pressure.

Up until this point the defense has seemed rather reserved and timid at times to go in there and make a play. Guys have seemed a little unsure of themselves and what their assignments were and the offense took advantage of that. This all seemed to change Tuesday when the Blue Raiders strapped on full pads for the first time. Coach Nix had the front seven ready and hungry to put their facemask on someone. Coach Ellis had the secondary flying around, diving for balls like I have not seen in the first several days of camp.

Some notable battles taking place and specific individual performances worth mentioning start with the defensive line. Omar McLendon, a three-year letterman, and Alexandro Antoine, a redshirt freshman, have been going back and forth making plays from their respective defensive end position. At linebacker, Roderic Blunt seems to have found a rhythm and seems to be around the football on every play. Also, Iman Smith, a freshman linebacker from Oldsmar, Florida found himself in the middle of a nice pass breakup during the Team period Wednesday. On the back end, Kenneth Gilstrap continues to make plays at his corner position, constantly going up in the air to fight for the ball. Also, Jajuan Harley, a Florida State transfer at safety, has had no problem putting his facemask in there to stop the run as well as leaving his feet to defend the pass. Based off the first few days of fall camp there are many battles going on for starting positions and the temperature is only heating up. Stay with us for further coverage on Blue Raider Fall Camp 2012.

FAN DAY: Meet the 2012 Blue Raiders and coaches at Middle Tennessee's annual Football Fan Day, this Sunday (August 12) from 2-4 PM at Murphy Center. Autographs, inflatables, free hotdogs and drinks, and loads of fun will be on hand for all members of the Blue Raider family. Bring your kids and friends to get them ready for the 2012 football season.

NEXT PRACTICE: The Blue Raiders will practice on Friday at 9:15 AM and again at 7:30 PM. Both practices are open to the public.

SEASON TICKETS: 1-888-YES-MTSU OR GoBlueRaiders.com.

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