Refocused Raiders open SBC play Saturday

Face FAU at 6 PM; Hall of Fame Induction at 3:30 PM

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - A refocusing of attention to details was the order of practice sessions this week for Middle Tennessee's football team as the Blue Raiders open the Sun Belt Conference portion of their schedule by hosting the Florida Atlantic Owls.

Kickoff is set for 6:02 pm in Floyd Stadium Saturday, and the game will be telecast live on ESPN3 with Chip Walters doing play-by-play and former Blue Raider and NFL quarterback Kelly Holcomb offering expert analysis. Walters and Holcomb will also be simulcasting the game on the Blue Raider Network. Nashville flagship station is WNSR 560 AM, and Murfreesboro flagship stations include WGNS 1450AM and WMOT 89.5 FM. Twitter updates can be received @mtathletics each game. Live stats and Web audio are available on GoBlueRaiders.com.

In interviews with the media all week, Head Coach Rick Stockstill has been very open in regard to mistakes in execution costing his Blue Raiders a chance in beating McNeese State last Thursday night in the home opener. He spoke of a couple of examples that could have altered the outcome of the 27-21 loss to McNeese.

> "There was a lot of competition out there this week, and hopefully that will improve our execution on both sides of the ball Saturday."

"As I have said before, it is not about our opponents, it is about us. I thought we did some things well in our first game, but we also did some things that need to get corrected. We are working to fix those things by game time.

"From our standpoint, the problems were mainly execution. We missed a block on the two-yard-line that was the difference in a field goal and a touchdown. It is about execution, and us controlling what we can control down there."

Stockstill said that the Blue Raiders spent a lot of time tackling this week, really physical, full-speed work. "There was a lot of competition out there, and hopefully that will improve our execution on both

sides of the ball."

FAU brings a 1-0 record into the game, coming from behind in the fourth quarter to beat Wagner, 7-3.
Stockstill reminded his players that "we can still win the conference, and that starts this week. In fact, all of our goals are still attainable except for an undefeated season. Everything else is still out there for us."

For fans that enjoy exciting football, this has all the makings of another of the MT-FAU classics of years past. The first time that the Blue Raiders played Florida Atlantic was in 2003 when the Owls, looking to move up to Division I-A, came into Murfreesboro and beat Andy McCollum's team 20-19 on a long scoring pass on the last play of the game. Middle Tennessee returned the favor in 2008, when Joe Craddock threw a 32-yard 'Hail Mary' scoring pass to Malcolm Beyah as time expired, and Alan Gendreau's extra point gave Middle Tennessee a stunning 14-13 win against Howard Schnellenberger's Owls.

That was the start of a four-game MT winning streak against the Owls, the last two by identical 38-14 scores. In last year's game, in Boca Raton, Blue Raider sophomore quarterback Logan Kilgore completed his first 19 passes to set a new school record and get his team off to a 21-0 lead in the 1st quarter.

That was the last time the Blue Raiders have tasted victory, but Kilgore is back, has one game under his belt in the new offensive scheme, and believes his team is ready to show what it can do.

The fourth quarter scoring drive against McNeese gave an inkling that the Blue Raiders are jelling on offense. He engineered a 17-play, 97-yard drive with seven minutes left in the game to cut the Cowboy's margin to 24-12. A two-point conversion to freshman Jordan Parker added two more points. After a McNeese field goal, Kilgore then hit Kyle Griswould with another scoring strike to close to 27-21 before time expired.

"That loss really hurt, but I think that is good. If we had just shrugged it off and acted like it didn't matter, I would have had a problem with that, but we didn't. We had good practices this week, and I think it will show on the field Saturday night. We have to put that game behind us and move on," said Kilgore.

From FAU's standpoint, this will be the first Sun Belt game as well as the first road game for the Owls new head coach, Carl Pelini, who was the defensive coordinator at Nebraska in 2011. It will be his first match-up with Stockstill.

Fans will want to come early to the game to watch the induction of five of MT's greatest athletes/coaches into the Blue Raider Athletic Hall of Fame on Saturday afternoon. The Class of 2012 includes All-American linebacker/defensive end Mike Caldwell, the Blue Raiders' 2nd member of basketball's 1,000 points club Harry Gupton, conference player of the year and women's basketball record holder Tawanya Mucker (Wilson), catcher Jayhawk Owens, and volleyball/basketball coach and women's administrator Diane Cummings (Turnham). The ceremony will be held at 3:30 pm on the lawn at the Hall of Fame. It is free and open to the public.

Middle Tennessee will be on the road for the first time next week when they travel to Memphis to play the Tigers. FAU's next two games are at Georgia and Alabama.

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