Blue Raiders battle in-state rival Memphis on Saturday

Kickoff set for 6pm at Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Both Middle Tennessee Head Coach Rick Stockstill and Memphis Head Coach Justin Fuente are expecting their respective teams to improve as much from last week's games as they did following their season openers two weeks ago.

If they both do, the result should be a highly-entertaining football game between the two in-state rivals on Saturday evening in Memphis.

The two teams will met for the fifth time since the series was resurrected in 2007, and the Blue Raiders have won three of the four thus far, including a 38-31 nail-biter in Murfreesboro last fall.

Kickoff for the game is 6:00 pm (CDT) in Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium. The game will be broadcast live over the Blue Raider Network, with Chip Walters doing the play-by-play and former Blue Raider and NFL quarterback Kelly Holcomb handling the color analysis. Flagship stations include Murfreesboro's WGNS AM-1450 and their FM stations, 100.5 and 101.9, as well as Nashville's WNSR 560 AM. Blue Raider fans may also follow them on Twitter @MTAthletics. While this game will not be televised, live stats and web audio are also available on the internet at GoBlueRaiders.com.

Middle Tennessee and Memphis both opened the season two weeks ago with losses to FCS teams McNeese State and UT Martin, respectively. Much improvement was noticed last week, however, as Middle Tennessee bounced back with a 31-17 win over Florida Atlantic in the Sun Belt Conference opener. UM played much better in a 33-28 loss to Sun Belt pre-season favorite Arkansas State in Jonesboro.

Saturday will be Stockstill's fourth time to face the Tigers, posting a 3-1 record, while new Memphis head Coach Justin Fuente has not competed against the Blue Raiders as a coach. He did, however,

play against Middle Tennessee in 1998 as the starting quarterback for Murray State. Boots Donnelly's Blue Raiders won that one, 35-14.

Stockstill was pleased with the improvements his team made prior to the FAU win.

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With early season momentum on the line, Middle Tennessee takes a balanced attack to Memphis with junior quarterback Logan Kilgore at the controls. The Blue Raiders are averaging 209 yards/game thru the air, 202.5 on the ground, and scoring 26 points per game.

When senior running back Benny Cunningham was unable to go last week against FAU, the Blue Raiders displayed a deep and powerful ground game that netted 302 yards on 55 carries for a 5.5 yard average.

A trio of running backs, led by true freshman Jordan Parker, pounded the Owl defense all evening. Parker, in only his second collegiate game, racked up 117 yards, with LSU transfer Drayton Calhoun adding 104 yards to give Middle Tennessee a pair of 100-yard rushers in one game for the first time in two years. Redshirt freshman Jeremiah Bryson added 56 more yards.

Meanwhile, Kilgore was completing 10-of-14 passes for 178 yards and scoring strikes of 28 and 36 yards to senior wideout Anthony Amos. In all, Amos caught four passes for 102 yards, and leads the team in receiving after two games. Memphis may remember Amos as the receiver who caught the game-winning throw from Kilgore last year, a 33-yard strike with 11 seconds left to play.

Stockstill pointed out that Memphis was not easy to get a read on because of the coaching change and a lot of new players.

"They are not the same team they were last year," said Stockstill. "They have a quarterback that transferred from Texas Tech (Jacob Karam), plus Coach Fuente came to Memphis from TCU (where he was the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach the past two years) and he has brought the TCU offense with him."

"It's a four-wide spread, no-huddle, and they will try to up-tempo you. Against Arkansas State last week, they scored on a blocked kick, then recovered a muffed punt in the end zone for another TD, so we will have to be ready on special teams as well."

Stockstill was impressed with the Memphis defense, noting that "it is a little unorthodox. They are all over the place. They will stand their front up, and then move them around. They are constantly moving when the ball is snapped. They have two really good inside players, and their linebackers are athletic and can run."

Memphis has one of the top punters in the nation in junior Tom Hornsey. He is ranked 14th nationally with a 45.92 average, and seven of his 12 punts have been downed inside the opponents

ten yard line, four of them inside the five. For his efforts at Arkansas State, Hornsey was named the National Punter of the Week by the College Football Performance Awards. Blue Raider Josh Davis averaged 46 yards a punt, including a 60-yarder against McNeese State.

Following the game at Memphis, the Blue Raiders will have an open date next Saturday (Sept. 22nd) before resuming action at Georgia Tech on Sept. 29th. The next home game, which will be Homecoming 2012, will be on Oct. 6th as they host Louisiana-Monroe, upset winners over Arkansas last week.

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