

The Burnette Blog: "Set the tone early"

Raiders, Tigers kick at 6 PM tonight

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The Blue Raiders hit the road for the first time during the 2012 campaign today as they will play Memphis for a 6pm contest in the Liberty Bowl. There's one phrase that comes to mind when a team travels to an opponent's backyard for the first road game: Set the Tone Early.

For many coaches, the way a team will handle the stress of being on the road for the first time can eat at your stomach for days. There will always be the upper classmen with road experience and there will always be the underclassmen, especially freshman, with no

road experience. The atmosphere of staying in a hotel for the first time, being required to be downstairs for various position and team meetings, and making yourself comfortable in your new "home away home" can be a challenge for youngsters and first timers.

The recipe when it comes game time is to set the tone early. Road games will typically be loud for the offense and quiet for the defense, something very different than playing at home. Coming out of the gates and letting your opponent know you are here to play is crucial. This also can take the crowd out of it from the beginning, and in some environments, this can be half the battle. Also, for the guys who have not been on the road before, settling in and being comfortable with their new surroundings is a must. When players feel comfortable they will play faster and with better focus.

On offense, I look for the Blue Raiders to move the ball with the running back duo of Drayton Calhoun and Jordan Parker, each of whom rushed for 100 plus yards last week combining for 302 yards on the ground. All week at practice both have looked solid in their cuts and timing of hitting the line of scrimmage. The air attack will open up soon after the linebackers are forced to respect the running backs and Anthony Amos looks to continue his stellar and record setting performance from a week ago. Amos locked in a career-best night with 102 yards receiving. The offensive line was challenged throughout the week at practice to pick up the intensity and physicality of their play and they responded well with gaping holes for the running backs and plenty of time for quarterback Logan Kilgore to find open receivers.



Defensively, the Blue Raiders could not have had a better first half. They shut out the Owls of FAU through two quarters before only allowing a field goal in the third quarter. After two costly fumbles during the first quarter the stingy defense made a statement from the start and did not allow FAU to move the ball. Coach Nix has preached intensity and mental toughness from day one of fall camp and last week the defense showed their coach they understood his message. Tonight I look for the defense to pick up where it left off with guys flying into the holes to stuff the run and not allowing receivers an inch of space in the secondary. There will be eleven hats on the ball at all times creating what should be an exciting atmosphere for Blue Raider fans both present and those watching at home.

What happened last week was the result of saying enough is enough and putting a foot down to that night's opponent. Tonight it is the Tigers of Memphis and I look for the Blue Raiders to play well. It all starts with setting the tone early. Go Blue Raiders!

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