THE BURNETTE BLOG: "Lightning Does Strike Twice"

Raiders have tough challenge against Bulldogs

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Today, the Blue Raiders will suit up against the undefeated, #12 team in the nation according to the most recent BCS poll. It's important to note this first because just a few weeks ago, Middle Tennessee went into the backyard of the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets and stung the home team, 49-28, in a hard fought match. No, Georgia Tech was not the #12 team in the nation, but they were a team favored by 30 points giving more credit to the saying "Any given Saturday". Currently, Mississippi State is playing some of the best football their fans have seen in years. At the same time, so are the Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders, who currently are off to their best start at 4-2 since the 2001 season.

Offensively, there is no doubt the loss of Benny Cunningham will hurt this unit. However, in times like these players must step up and fill the shoes of the fallen. Luckily, MT has been blessed this season with a stable of running backs that are capable of carrying the load heading into this epic showdown. It could turn into a running back by committee look for the offense in order to get the production they are looking for on Saturday. The duo of Jordan Parker and Drayton Calhoun has already seen each player dash for 100+ yards in a single game this season against FAU. Reggie Whatley had a monstrous run in the final minute to seal the victory over FIU last Saturday and more game changing plays like this will be expected from him in the near future. The offensive line will face the nastiest and by far most skilled defensive front they have seen all season. Picking up blitzes and establishing the front quickly will be crucial in order for the offense to have success. The wide receivers will need to secure the ball first before looking for more as the bullets flying at them this week will have a little more firepower than the secondary's they have seen in the past.

Defensively, play your game. MSU's offensive front is a little banged up after the cage fight they had last Saturday night with the University of Tennessee. The defense will have to use this to their advantage. I've said it all season and in no game is this more important than right now: hit them in the mouth from the first play and let them know you mean business. Their mindset heading into this

game is that the MT defense can't handle the size of the MSU o-line and the speed of the backs. A couple three and outs early will go a long way in setting the tone. The number one thing the defense needs this week is solid tackling. The playmakers of MSU have done well getting yards after contact this season to keep many of their drives alive. Solid tackling can cut those big gains down and start to force longer drives and potentially 4th downs.

The key to success lies in the ability of the offense to be able to strike quick and early. If MT can get the Bulldogs on their heels early, panic could start to set in on the other sideline which is usually the blueprint for a huge win on the road. Remember, lightning does strike twice. Go Blue Raiders!

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