THE BURNETTE BLOG: "Race to the Finish"

Raiders, Mean Green kickoff at 2:32 PM today

October 27, 2012 · @MTAthletics

The Blue Raiders went toe to toe with the number 12 team in the nation last weekend for a little more than a half of football. At halftime, Coach Stockstill said his guys felt as if they could win the game and it's that kind of attitude that championship football teams are made from. It's amazing how fast this 2012 season has gone by. It seems like yesterday the boys were strapping on the pads for the first time and getting after it in the board drills grinding through two-a-days. Now here we sit, the last weekend in October and Middle Tennessee has put themselves in a good spot to race for the finish and earn the chance to go bowling come December.

North Texas comes to town today with the same conference record and also hoping to make it to that magical number "6". When it gets to this point in the season and conference rankings start to take shape spectators can expect to see one thing: a bloody cage match that makes this game so great. Each team will lay it on the line today knowing how big the outcome of this game will be.

Middle Tennessee has done a nice job this week in working out the soreness they had after the Mississippi State game. Offensively, it is crucial for quarterback Logan Kilgore to get into a rhythm early with his receivers. So far this season MT hasn't played particularly well at home and it is time to give these fans something big to cheer about. As always, all eyes will be on wide receiver Anthony Amos as he continues to make huge plays for the offense. The key in these jaw-slapping conference matchups is the ability to run the football. The offensive line has to find a way to open holes for any of MT's plethora of running backs and prove they can move the football on the ground. North Texas will have no choice but to stack the box in this case, which in turn opens up the passing game for Kilgore and his receivers. Throughout the week the offensive coaches have continued to preach the importance of playing fast and keeping the defense guessing. If they can have some success early North Texas will have to play catch up the rest of the afternoon.

Defensively, Middle Tennessee has to find a way to limit the big play. Too many times the past couple of weeks they have done a great job of stopping them early but allowing drives to be extended because of big plays or missed assignments. The key to victory for the defense today is winning the 3rd down battles and getting off the field. North Texas cannot be allowed to find a rhythm

on offense because so far they have been gaining their momentum by keeping drives alive. Once they settle in it seems the momentum just keeps building. The play of the defensive line will be under a microscope studied by Coach Tyrone Nix. North Texas loves to run the football and can only do so if the big boys up front are getting a push. The defensive line needs to play nasty and with relentless effort, one of my favorite sayings. Create a new line of scrimmage and force the offensive linemen into their own backfield. This in turn will give the linebackers a chance to make plays at the original line of scrimmage for no gain.

They will not go to the air often but when they do the secondary must make the plays that matter. Long passes and deep out cuts where the receiver gets out of bounds 20 yards downfield cannot happen if the defense is to be successful.

In all, expect an exciting and fast paced game. Both teams know what's on the line this late in the season holding the records they do. If the Blue Raiders can protect the football, get off the field defensively on third downs, and have success running the football I think it will be a good day inside Floyd Stadium . No silly turnovers or penalties early and the ball can really get going for this team. Play like your backs are against the wall.

The 2012 season is on the downhill side of the mountain and it's a race to the finish! Go Blue Raiders!

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