Explosive plays lead Blue Raiders past WKU

MT reaches bowl eligibility for third time in four years

November 2, 2012 · @MTAthletics

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Late game heroics on special teams and defense spurred Middle Tennessee to a 34-29 win over its archrival Western Kentucky. The winning effort also helped MT reach bowl eligibility status Thursday evening at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

MT (6-3, 4-1) moved into second place in the Sun Belt as the Raiders came out victorious in a game that saw three ties and remained close until the very end. WKU (6-3, 3-2) fought back three times, but never held a lead during the contest.

Redshirt sophomore Reggie Whatley found the gamewinner for Middle Tennessee with his 96-yard touchdown return at the six minute mark in the fourth quarter. Whatley broke through to give the Blue Raiders a 34-27 advantage.

With one of the best offenses in the Sun Belt, WKU drove down the field. Kawaun Jakes' pass inside the Blue Raider 21 yardline was deflected by Brentwood native Reggie Farmer and intercepted by speedster Kenneth Gilstrap with 1:39 left in the game. The Blue Raiders kept possession for the final time as Logan Kilgore ran in the endzone for a safety to give Middle Tennessee its sixth victory this season.

The Blue Raiders became bowl eligible for the third time in four seasons. It also marked the earliest time since 2001 that MT had reached the six win plateau. MT put together 342 yards, despite allowing WKU to gain 438.

Whatley finished the game with a school-record 222 kick return yards. The Rome, Ga., native also recovered a Blue Raider fumble that resulted in three points.

Freshman Jordan Parker set a personal best with 149 yards on 32 carries and a touchdown in the game. Parker broke loose for a 58-yard scamper earlier in the first quarter. The freshman has reached 100-plus yards twice this season.

In the passing game, Kilgore reached the 2,000 yard mark this season. The gunslinger completed 11-of-17 attempts for 118 yards and two touchdowns.

Senior wideout Anthony Amos grabbed both touchdowns from Kilgore to give him eight for the season. Amos is now third in school history for reception TDs in a single-season.

Defensively, the Blue Raiders spread out the tackling. Kevin Byard led MT with seven stops, while Craig Allen and Justin Jones each had six. The interception by Gilstrap was his second of the season.

Middle Tennessee's offense found the early momentum as the Blue Raiders added a 10 spot in the first quarter. Carlos Lopez connected on a 19-yard field goal during MT's first offensive possession. Parker found a career-long run of 58 yards to paydirt to give Middle Tennessee the 10-0 edge.

Three consecutive scoring drives helped the Hilltoppers equalize the game. Jakes threw a 35-yard bullet to Austin Aikens for the Toppers' first touchdown. MT added its 17th point when Kilgore found Amos for eight yard touchdown.
WKU cut the game within three when Jakes found Antonio Andrews for a 24-yard touchdown to cap a six and a half minute drive. WKU tied the game when Garrett Schwettman hit a field goal at the 3:49 mark.

Middle Tennessee outgained Western Kentucky 248-to-225. The freshman Parker had 138 of the yards with one touchdown. Kilgore was 4-of-7 for 46 yards and a touchdown.

In the second half, the Raider offense marched 80 yards to score the go-ahead touchdown. Kilgore found Amos for a five yard grab to give MT a 24-17 lead with 5:33 left in the third quarter.

Western Kentucky's Jakes threw a 32 yard strike to Willie McNeil to tie the game at 24-24. A WKU turnover in the fourth quarter proved to be costly for the Toppers. Whatley's recovery helped set up a Lopez 19-yard field goal to give MT a three point lead with 11 minutes left in the game.

The game tied up for the third time when Schwettman made a 28-yard field goal. Whatley bolted for 96 yards on the kick return to score the touchdown and give MT a 34-27 lead with six minutes left in the contest.

Gilstrap's interception at the 1:39 mark helped Middle Tennessee regain possession. Kilgore ran out of bounds on the final play to give the Blue Raiders the victory.

MT visits newcomer South Alabama on Saturday, Nov. 17 in Mobile. Kickoff is slated for 2:30 p.m.

1st Quarter

On its first possession, Middle Tennessee used five minutes to find the first score of the games. Carlos Lopez easily made a 19-yard field goal to put the Raiders up 3-0. WKU was forced a three and out on its first offensive possession, giving the MT offense an opportunity to jump ahead early. Freshman Jordan Parker broke through with a 58 yard run to give MT a 10 point advantage. The Toppers answered on their next possession when Austin Aikens caught a 35 yard pass from Kawaun Jakes to make it a 10-7 contest. Reggie Whatley's 40-yard return set up a prime field position for the Blue Raiders. MT controlled the time of possession nearly taking 11 minutes and

holding WKU, the nation's leader in TOP, to fou.

2nd Quarter

Logan Kilgore connected with senior Anthony Amos for an eight yard touchdown to extend Middle Tennessee's lead to 17-3. WKU would answer with two more scoring drives. Kewaun Jakes found Antonio Andrews with a 24-yard pass to close a 6:29 drive. WKU used good field position to tack on a field goal from the Garrett Schwettman at the 3:49 mark. A Blue Raider offensive drive got to the WKU 32 yardline. However, the Toppers stuffed tailback Jordan Parker on fourth and one to force a turnover on downs. The Hilltoppers drove down to the Raider 29 yardline, but Schwettman failed on a 47-yard field goal attempt at the half. MT put together 248 yards of offense, holding WKU to 225 yards. Parker ran 19 carries for 136 yards and one touchdown. Logan Kilgore had four completions out of seven attempts for 46 yards and a touchdown.

3rd Quarter

From MT's own 20 yardline, the Blue Raider offense drove 80 yards to retake the lead. Logan Kilgore broke away from the pocket and found Amos for his second touchdown of the game to put MT up 24-17 with 5:33 left in the third quarter. The Toppers scored a rather easy touchdown to tie the game at 24-24 when a Blue Raider slipped and Kawaun Jakes found Willie McNeal for a 32-yard touchdown.

4th Quarter

A Blue Raider punt proved to be deadly for WKU. The returner fumbled as MT's Stephen Roberts forced the fumble and Reggie Whatley recovered at the WKU 19. The Hilltopper defense held strong and force Carlos Lopez to kick a 19-yard field goal, giving MT a three point lead with 11 minutes left. For the third time of the night, WKU tied the game when Schwettman kicked a 28-yard field goal. On the kickoff, Reggie Whatley sprinted 96 yards for a touchdown to put the Blue Raiders up 34-27 with six minutes left. WKU converted on fourth and two as McNeil caught a big pass inside MT territory. The Hilltoppers once again found a fourth down conversion to keep their hopes alive with two minutes left in regulation. Reggie Farmer tipped a pass that allowed Kenneth Gilstrap to collect an interception and disrupt the WKU momentum. MT ran out the clock in the final moments as Kilgore took an intentional safety to give MT their sixth win this season.

Game Notes

CAPTAINS: Tonight's game captains were C Micah James, DE Omar McLendon, and DT Jimmy Staten.

KILGORE GETS 2,000: With 118 passing yards tonight, Logan Kilgore went over the 2,000-yard mark for the season. Kilgore is just the second signal-caller in school history to record back-to-back 2,000-yard seasons after posting 2,231 yards in 2011. Kilgore joins Clint Marks who accomplished the feat in 2004 and 2005.

PARKER HAS CAREER NIGHT: Freshman Jordan Parker had a huge night against the Sun Belt's top ranked defense. Parker rushed for a career-high 151 yards on 32 attempts and one touchdown. In the first quarter, Parker went 58 yards for a touchdown which went down as the longest run of his career.

NO. 25: Middle Tennessee registered its 25th 200-yard rushing game under Rick Stockstill with 224 yards tonight against WKU. It marks the fourth time this season the Raiders have topped the 200 mark. WKU entered tonight's game ranked No. 1 in the SBC in total defense and was allowing just 108 rushing yards per game.

AMOS TIED FOR 3RD: With two touchdown receptions tonight against WKU, wide receiver Anthony Amos ran his season total to eight. That ranks tied for the third most in a single-season at MT and is three shy of equaling the school record of 11 set by Kerry Wright in 2004.

WHATLEY STRIKES: Sophomore Reggie Whatley turned in a huge game in the kickoff return department. Whatley broke a 96-yard return for a touchdown to give MT a 34-27 lead, which went down as the fifth longest in school history. Whatley finished the game with a school-record 222 yards on kick returns, while also recovering a fumble for the Blue Raiders in the second half.

BOWL ELIGIBLE: For the third time in four years, the Blue Raiders are bowl eligible. Middle Tennessee posted six wins in 2010 and had a historic 10-win season in 2009. MT has reached bowl eligibility four times under head coach Rick Stockstill.

QUICK HITTERS: QB Logan Kilgore started his 22nd career game today which ranks as the most on the team ... DE Omar McLendon played in his team-best 45th game today ... MT scored on its opening possession of the game for the fifth time this season ... Logan Kilgore surpassed Teddy Morris for 6th place on the all-time passing list ... MT is now 4-2 against WKU in the Rick Stockstill era.

Printed on April 23, 2014
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/63829