Blue Raiders force five turnovers in 24-21 win over Troy

Middle Tennessee ends six-game losing skid to Troy

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Kevin Byard's 77-yard interception return for a touchdown with 5:48 remaining proved to be the difference in the annual Battle of the Palladium Saturday, as the Middle Tennessee football team snapped its six-game losing streak to Troy with a 24-21 win over the Trojans at Floyd Stadium.

The Blue Raiders forced a season-high five turnovers in the game. Byard was in on three of them, forcing a fumble and picking off two passes while also recording six tackles. Offensively, Middle Tennessee racked up 328 yards on the day. Freshman running back Jordan Parker ran for 141 yards on 19 carries. In the first quarter Parker scored on a 98-yard run, the longest in Middle Tennessee and Sun Belt history. He also broke the school record for single-season rushing yards by a freshman in Saturday's game. Parker now has 778 yards rushing on the season, passing the previous record of 735 set by Eugene Gross in 2003.

Middle Tennessee's (8-3, 6-1) defense was stout early. The Blue Raiders forced Troy (5-7, 3-5) into a 3-and-out on their first possession. On the Trojans second possession, Byard intercepted a pass from Deon Anthony to give Middle Tennessee the ball at the Troy 40-yard line with 10:55 to go in the opening quarter. The Blue Raiders then drove 20 yards, converting a 3rd-and-7 in the process, and got a 37 yard field goal by Carlos Lopez to take a 3-0 lead with 8:41 to play in the first quarter.

Troy attempted to take the lead on its next drive. The Trojans started from their own 38-yard line, gaining 31 yards on a shovel pass by Anthony to Shawn Southward. Troy got the ball all the way down to the Blue Raiders' three yard line before Middle Tennessee's Roderic Blunt forced Justin Albert to fumble the football at the one yard line. Omar McClendon recovered the loose ball for the Blue Raiders, giving Middle Tennessee the ball at the two. Parker then broke off his record-breaking run on the next play, running 98 yards for his third rushing touchdown of the season. Lopez's extra point put the Blue Raiders ahead 10-0 with 4:32 to go in the first.

The Trojans got on the scoreboard at the end of the quarter. Troy drove 80 yards in 11 plays over

the last 4:32 as Corey Robinson threw a one yard pass to Eric Robinson for a touchdown, making the score 10-7. After the Blue Raiders went three plays and out on their next possession, Troy drove 20 yards before Middle Tennessee forced another Trojans turnover. On 3rd and 10 at the Middle Tennessee28, Corey Robinson completed a pass to D.J. Taylor. Taylor ran to the seven before Byard punched the ball loose and the Blue Raiders recovered.

Middle Tennessee drove to the Troy 26 yard line and had a chance to extend the lead, but Lopez's field goal was blocked. The Blue Raiders then returned the favor, blocking a Troy punt to set them up at the Trojans' 16 yard line with 8:01 to go in the half. Middle Tennessee gained seven yards on three plays, taking a 13-7 lead on a 26 yard field goal by Lopez. The Blue Raiders took that six-point advantage into the locker room.

Troy took the lead on their first possession of the second half. After forcing a Middle Tennessee punt to start the third quarter, the Trojans drove 78 yards down the field and scored on a four yard pass from Anthony to Jarod Lee to tie the game at 13-13. Will Scott's extra point put Troy in the lead 14-13. Anthony and Robinson completed passes to six different receivers during the 10-play drive.

While the Blue Raiders' offense was held in check for most of the third quarter, Middle Tennessee's defense kept the deficit at one by forcing a pair of Troy punts. The Trojans drove into Middle Tennessee territory late in the third quarter, but once again the Blue Raiders' defense came up big. Jerrold Frazier forced Troy's Justin Albert to cough up the ball at the Middle Tennessee 35 yard line. Dearco Nolan scooped up the ball and ran 59 yards before being forced out of bounds at the Troy eight yard line. The Blue Raiders moved the ball to the four yard line, but were held out of the end zone. Lopez knocked a 21 yard field goal through the uprights to put Middle Tennessee back in the lead, 16-14, with 1:03 to play in the third quarter.

After forcing another Trojans punt early in the fourth quarter, the Blue Raiders looked to extend their lead with 13:45 to play. Starting from its own 21 yard line, Middle Tennessee drove to its 45 yard line on a 24-yard pass by Kilgore to Griswould. On the next play, Kilgore completed a screen pass to Reggie Whatley inside Troy territory. However, the Trojans' Kanorris Davis knocked the ball free and Troy recovered the fumble at its 44 yard line. The turnover was Middle Tennessee's first since the game at Mississippi State on Oct. 20.

Troy converted on the turnover, scoring on an eight-play, 56 yard drive. Anthony ran in a six-yard quarterback keeper to give the Trojans a 21-16 lead with 9:06 to play in the game. As quickly as the Blue Raiders regained possession, they gave the ball away. On the second play of the ensuing drive, Kilgore threw a lateral to Cameron Deen. Deen then threw the ball down the sideline but was intercepted by Brynden Trawick who returned the pick 47 yards to the Blue Raiders' 47 yard line.

The Trojans converted a 3rd-and-7 on a pass to Southward, with Middle Tennessee linebacker Craig Allen getting injured on the play. The game was delayed 16 minutes as Allen was taken off the field in an ambulance. He was taken to Vanderbilt Medical Center, where it was reported that Allen had feeling in all of his extremities. The Blue Raiders then held strong, forcing Troy into another 3rd-and-long situation. Robinson dropped back to pass and was intercepted by Byard who ran it back 77 yards for a touchdown, putting Middle Tennessee back in front 22-21 with 5:48 to play. The Blue Raiders went for the two point conversion and got it as Kilgore threw to Jacob Corbaley to give Middle Tennessee a 24-21 lead.

Troy had one final opportunity to at least force overtime. The Trojans drove down to the Middle Tennessee 36 yard line but were forced behind the chains as J.D. Jones tackled D.J. Taylor for a loss of two yards on second down. On 3rd-and-11, Leighton Gasque put pressure on Robinson and forced an incomplete pass. Needing to convert on fourth down to keep the drive alive, Robinson's pass intended for Eric Thomas fell incomplete. The Blue Raiders took over at their own 37 yard line and ran out the clock, thanks in part to 16 rushing yards by Parker to seal the win.

Middle Tennessee's win gives the Blue Raiders eight wins, and six conference wins, for the first time since 2009. The Blue Raiders travel to Arkansas State next Saturday, Dec. 1, with the Sun Belt Conference title on the line. Kickoff in Jonesboro, Ark. is scheduled for 2 p.m.

GAME NOTES

CAPTAINS: Today's game captains were Omar McLendon, Anthony Amos, and Kendall Dangerfield.

NEW COMBO: Middle Tennessee came out in a new uniform combo today against Troy. The Raiders donned black helmets, blue jersey's, and silver pants.

PARKER GOES LONG: Freshman Jordan Parker set a school record with a 98-yard touchdown run late in the first quarter. That broke the previous long run of 92 yards by Jim Bostic against WKU in 1941. The 98-yard run also went down as the longest in the history of the Sun Belt, breaking the previous mark of 89 yards set by Tyrell Fenroy of ULL vs. ULM on Oct. 4, 2008.

PARKER SETS RUSHING RECORD: Jordan Parker broke Middle Tennessee's single-season freshman rushing record with his 144 yards against Troy. Parker now has 778 yards on the year and surpassed the previous record of 735 yards set by Eugene Gross in 2003.

THREE IN A ROW: Freshman Jordan Parker recorded his third straight 100-yard rushing game with 144 yards against Troy. Parker is the first Raider to have three consecutive games with 100 or more yards since D.D. Kyles in 2009.

BYARD COMES UP BIG: Redshirt freshman Kevin Byard had a career-best two interceptions against Troy but none bigger than the one he hauled in late in the fourth quarter. With under six minutes to play and MT trailing, 21-16, Byard stepped in front of a Corey Robinson pass and returned it 77 yards for a touchdown. It went down as the sixth longest return in school history. Byard now has a team-best four interceptions on the season.

QUICK HITTERS: Carlos Lopez hit his 17th FG of the season and that ranks as tied for the second most in a single-season at MT (18 is record) ... Sammy Seamster made his third career start today ... Kevin Byard recorded his fourth interception of the season and the 12th for the Blue Raiders this year (team had 4 all of 2011) ... QB Logan Kilgore started his 24th career game today which ranks as the most on the team ... DE Omar McLendon played in his team-best 47th game today ... MT has now won the opening coin toss five times in last six games ... Dearco Nolan's third quarter fumble return was the first of his career ... MT has now won four straight games on Nov. 24.