

# Open letter from the Director of Athletics

## Massaro provides insight into bowl omission, conference move

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### To our supporters of Blue Raiders Athletics,

As our stakeholders, I wanted to reach out and provide some background on the events of the last few days, so you can have a better understanding of what transpired.

I know you, as Blue Raider faithful, share in my disappointment that our football team was not extended an invitation to compete in a post-season bowl game - despite our 8-4 overall record and the distinction of having the biggest year-over-year win improvement in the country in 2012.



However, this emotional low point on Sunday came just days after we celebrated last Thursday our invitation into Conference USA, an affiliation that will elevate the standing, competitiveness and stature of Middle Tennessee State University's athletics program. As I said at the press conference, "the invitation was a validation of the labor and progress we have made at Middle Tennessee athletically and academically."

The lingering frustration will not overshadow the tremendous season our football program enjoyed. We upset ACC Coastal Division Champion Georgia Tech on the road by 21 points, went 5-2 on the road, and finished second in the conference with a 6-2 mark.

We all remember the excitement generated by Coach Rick Stockstill and his team's victory over Western Kentucky on November 1. Our Blue Raiders were 10-point underdogs going into this nationally-televised road game, yet we pulled out a thrilling victory that demonstrated the tenacity and spirit of our team. While we had been touting our potential to bowl committees before the WKU game, our efforts ramped up after we became bowl eligible with the win in Bowling Green.

Within a few days of that win, it became evident that the conference landscape was about to change

yet again when Maryland and Rutgers announced a move to the Big Ten. The domino eventually led to Conference USA talks to re-engage and discussions moved quickly at that time.

As you know, President McPhee and I have been quietly and deliberately looking for ways to raise the level of athletic competition and success for Blue Raiders athletics. We have long admired Conference USA as the next, logical step in our program's evolution - and the conference publicly and privately made it known that MTSU would be an excellent addition to its ranks.

On Nov. 25, two days before it was announced that East Carolina and Tulane would leave C-USA, the conference reached out to us, asking informally if we would be interested in joining. After careful consideration, President McPhee agreed that this move would be in the best interest of our University and we began serious and immediate discussions on joining C-USA.

We had hoped that the announcement of the realignment could have waited until after our Sun Belt football championship game with Arkansas State on Saturday. However, as word emerged that both MTSU and fellow Sun Belt member Florida Atlantic University were being courted by C-USA, the Sun Belt scheduled a board meeting on Nov. 28 to discuss the departure of member schools. One of the proposals we heard from a reliable source was increasing exit fees to a sum as high as \$10 million.

Knowing this, President McPhee and I agreed the university should tender its withdrawal from the Sun Belt before the meeting convened. Upon notice of our withdrawal, the Sun Belt cancelled its meeting. But after this point, it became clear that the news of MTSU and FAU's movements were not going to wait until after Saturday's game. As such, both MTSU and FAU held press conferences on Nov. 29 to announce the two universities were going to join C-USA.

Against the backdrop of conference realignment, we continued to make our case for a bowl invitation. We were assured by the Sun Belt that our decision to move to C-USA would not affect how it negotiated on our behalf for bowl placement. When the dust settled on Sunday, we learned that despite playing for the Sun Belt Championship, we would not be among the teams heading for post-season play.

As Coach Rick Stockstill said Sunday about the football team and the bowl omission, "they did what they had to do on the football field and were not rewarded."

Personally, I am frustrated with decisions made in board rooms and not on the football field. Our team and fans deserve better. I think it is clear that the bowl system needs improvement and should be better than this. However, this incredibly frustrating turn of events will not define us or our season.

As President McPhee said Sunday night, when we say "I am True Blue," we are speaking about character and commitment. I am so proud of the character and commitment put forth by this football team, what they have accomplished this season and the turnaround they have made. I believe in this football team, the momentum we have built - and the future is bright.

Thank you for your continued support of Blue Raiders athletics and please join me in congratulating Coach Stockstill and his team for an exciting and memorable football season.

I invite you to make the next move with us.

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