

Middle Tennessee opens C-USA era at Florida Atlantic

Raiders and Owls kickoff at 11 a.m. CT in CSS televised game

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Head Coach Rick Stockstill

Opening Comments:

I'm looking forward to this week's game. Everybody knows it's the first conference game, so that raises the ante a bit. We've got to have a great week of practice, make sure we get some things corrected from last week against Memphis and get ready to play a good Florida Atlantic team.



Last year, it was a 7-0 game with 10 minutes to go in the third quarter before we kind of ran away with it. They're a good team coming off a good win over South Florida. Their last five or six games going back to last year, especially on defense, they've been a good team. Their defense reminds me a lot of North Carolina from a speed and athletic standpoint. They'll pressure and come at you with a lot of man coverage, so we'll have to be able to handle that. They're not as big up front as Memphis, but they're fast and athletic.

Offensively, they have two quarterbacks who are pretty similar. They want to run the ball with both of them. I think both of them are equally talented. They always have talented skill guys. Their receivers and running backs have speed. They're solid in the kicking game.

Like I said last week with Memphis, this is going to be a 60-minute game and we have to be ready to play our best.

On last week versus Memphis:

I thought we would have had to have more than 17 points against Memphis last week to win the game. I thought there were times last week where we did things offensively, and times when we didn't. We knew going in that it was going to be a struggle to run the ball against Memphis, as they're big and physical up front. Plus, having two starters out on the offensive line, we thought it would be a little difficult, and it was. That game didn't surprise me one bit. I think for people on the outside, they saw the score of last year's game and thought we would run away with it. We knew it would be a fight. I told you last week, it would be a 60-minute game.

On the running backs:

You try to highlight what they do the best. But you can't say "Here comes Jeremiah, we're going to do this," or "Here comes Reggie, we're going to do this," or "Here comes Jordan, we're going to do this."

Jeremiah (Bryson) would have played more than he did last week, but because we weren't able to get outside last week and practice, he never got hit. I didn't want to have him in, run inside, get hit and not know how his shoulder was going to hold up. That played a bit of a role in him being limited.

On the warm weather at Florida Atlantic:

It hasn't been a hot summer here. It will test our mental toughness. We know it's going to be hot. I told the team on Sunday, you have to take care of your body and start hydrating now. Don't wait until Friday night. It's mental preparation. We can't control it. We just have to practice as hard as we can. Anytime you go on the road, there's mental toughness you have to display to be successful, going into an environment from a heat standpoint that you have to fight through. We won't make a big deal of it. I talked to them on Sunday, and I'll talk to them throughout the week to make sure they're hydrating. We'll go down there, and we have to be tough. That's what we are. We're a physically, mentally tough team.

On Florida Atlantic being the first conference game:

It doesn't seem any different. It was a conference game for the last seven years, and it's still a conference game. It's not East Carolina, who we've never played before. Last year, it was the second year of the game, and we knew the importance of that. It's the first conference game again this year and we have to be ready to play.

On the defense being the strength of the team:

At times, our offense has played well, and at times our defense has played well. At times, our defense hasn't played well, and at times our offense hasn't played well. Early in the year, it takes time to make sure you're consistent in every area. I'm not surprised. We have good coaches and good players on defense. We've had some injuries on both sides of the ball that have hurt us on the offensive and defensive lines. I like the potential of our team. I like the potential of our offense. I like the potential of our defense. But potential will get you beat. Performance is what wins games. We have to perform on a higher, more consistent level on offense and defense. We're not playing as well as we're capable of on both sides of the ball.

On the identity of the team:

I've always said you find the identity of your team in the third game. In the first game, we weren't really faced with any adversity. The second game, I told them at halftime that we're going to find out in the second half what kind of team we're going to be. They proved to me at North Carolina that we're going to be a dang good football team, because of how they fought, competed and played in the second half.

Last week, I said we'd form our identity. To me, our identity is a team that is physically and mentally tough that's going to play smart, protect the ball, and continue to fight and play hard for 60 minutes.

That's what that team did. There was adversity throughout the course of the game, and there will be adversity in this game. They fought through it. The offense struggled, but nobody complained and nobody pointed fingers. We kept believing in each other, and the offense went down and got points. The kicking game missed a field goal. We came back and made a kick. The defense struggled a bit, we had a couple drives where we couldn't stop them, and no one complained. The defense kept fighting, and we came back and got a stop at the end of the game to win it. I believe in this team. I love the attitude of this team. It's got an edge about it and we've got to keep that.

On the early start time:

To me, I like early games. I think where it gets us is that pregame meal is at 7:00 a.m. on our watch. You get up pretty early. That's why I say rest is pretty critical throughout this week. You can't go to bed at 6:00 Friday night and expect to be fresh. You have to get your rest and hydrate during the week. I like the early games. I like to get up and play. I don't see that having any effect on us.

On the added importance of conference games:

Conference games are critical. They're more important in the big picture. That game last week against Memphis was personal. That's how we took it. We're going to be tough and physical, and we're going to get after it. When that game's over, you're happy on the field, but by the time you get back to the locker room you're focused on the next game. You look at it, you're either going to be 1-0 in the conference or 0-1. You take it one game at a time. Sure, it's coach talk. But when you start emphasizing one game over another, your players see it. They have to get up 12 times to be ready to play, and you can never emphasize one over the other. Yes, this is more important than Memphis, North Carolina or Western Carolina, and I'll say the same thing next week.

Redshirt Senior QB Logan Kilgore

On the Running Backs:

I think that Jordan(Parker) is such a versatile, big and powerful back. We have seen him time and time again running away from defenders. He is a complete package. Reggie (Whatley) is a change of pace, because he is so quick and has a smaller frame. His quickness gives us a change-up as far as running outside. He does a really good job of hitting the holes, he runs so quickly. Jeremiah (Bryson) and (William) Pratcher give us two solid backs. Jeremiah is a quick, big-play guy and he will get some short-yardage runs but I believe he is better outside than between the tackles. Pratcher has done a great job of inside, outside, everything and he is a very patient running back and it makes him successful.

On Jeremiah Bryson's added element to the offense:

He is another playmaker, body, another chess piece for Coach Faulkner to add to his set. He can come into the back field. Last week, we motioned him out and threw a route to him. He is a pretty complete player and Coach Faulkner is one of the best of utilizing his personnel. He will add that to the bunch.

On the offensive line injuries:

They look to experience, both those guys (Josh Chester or Adam Stickle). To Chester's left you look

to Josh Walker, who has been in a ton of situations and always has a calming influence when making calls and making sure everyone is on the right page. Same thing with Isaiah Anderson who has been in a ton of big games, and has been there, that experience on both sides of those guys are helpful.

On the line calls:

Everything is the exact same. If there is a drop off at all. I don't notice it. I think Jesse (Grisham) has played really well. Last week, he played really well against an NFL caliber nose guard all night long. Jessie was a guy that was limited during spring and camp and really came out and had a really good showing.

On if the heat affects the team:

The humidity is definitely different. I don't think that we really recognize it. I have heard it more from fans. I remember at Purdue it was a record heat and had no idea. We become so focused on the game that you don't take time to realize how hot it is. We hope to avoid any cramping. I don't see the heat being a factor.

On the Florida Atlantic defense:

They are a really good defense. The defense has been the strength of their team the past couple of years. Watching them on film, this will be another really good defense. The defensive line and safeties at North Carolina were really good. The defensive line was really good against Memphis. Once again watching these guys, they are quick in the secondary and not afraid to man you up. They will look you in the face and saw if you're going to beat me, you're not going to trick me. It's one-on-one and let's see who is better. They have some good talent and I am excited for the challenge.

On if the team needs to score more:

Every week is different. There are different things. Looking over the course of a game, you might run 50 to 100 offensive plays based on a couple different things: converting third downs, key penalties and random things that go on throughout the course of game. For whatever reason, you may score more here and less there. Bottom line we are going to do what it takes to win. Every time we get the ball we are trying to score. We will just have to wait and see.

On if this feels like a conference game:

I think that playing a team that we have had so much experience playing is the same pressure on the game, but just a different name of the conference. FAU has always been a tough game and I am really excited about the challenge.

On establishing the team's identity early in the season:

It might be tougher on fans and coaches hearts, but at the end of the day it is better for a team to be tested. I think we have always done a great job of scheduling opponents that challenge us and put us in different situations. Looking at the North Carolina game, it's a tough game against an ACC opponent and we go in and convert on an onside kick and are in so many different situations. Here

with Memphis it's the second time in Floyd Stadium being able to get the ball with three minutes left and have to score to win. Those types of situations are huge and having those experiences in non-conference is great for young guys. I was excited about the way the team responded and I think it goes back to senior leadership. We have a lot of experienced guys out there. Bottom line we didn't perform well on offense sometimes, but to still have the confidence to know that we are going to get the ball back and go score. We finally put the pieces together and went and did it.

On if it feels different on playing their first C-USA game:

Not really. I think that if it were the 2013 season and in the Sun Belt Conference we would be saying it is a huge game because it is the first conference game and we want to be 1-0. It is Conference USA, but it would be different if we were playing East Carolina or Marshall, someone we haven't played before. It's FAU. It has never been a non-conference game for me and every time we have played them we use the same attention to detail and importance because it is a conference game.

Redshirt Senior LB Stephen Roberts

On the team playing tougher:

We are wanting to be great. Anything between the lines and between the whistles is far game to me.

On the team's depth:

Our coach is still working on it. We have a freshman that has some good potential. He is looking pretty good and need to get him right on a couple of things. Yes, we still are pretty slim so we are trying to stay fresh.

On if the heat is a factor:

At first, in warm-ups and pregame we might notice it, but once we hear the buzzer for the first quarter I think it goes all out and we are just ready to play and tuned in.

On the Florida Atlantic offense:

They have a lot of good talent, a couple good running backs that are big and will try and run you over. Good running and passing quarterbacks. We need to be aware of their speed. We have to work on the tempo and prevent first downs.

On if the first C-USA game is any different:

Not really. Like Coach (Stockstill) says, he just comes to every game like its regular game. Yes, it's a conference game and we would like to win it and be 1-0 in the conference. But other than that, we just look at it like it's any other game.

On if he has glanced at the C-USA standings:

Not a lot. I try and keep up a little and catch a game here and there. I saw a little of FAU's last game, but other than that I haven't been able to keep up with the new teams.

On playing Florida Atlantic:

Every year they have pretty good talent. We need to make sure we are ready and have the offensive and defense scheme prepared and know what we need to do on both sides of the ball.

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