

Raiders, Mean Green take rivalry to C-USA

Kickoff set for 6:05 PM in Denton

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DENTON - Despite the fact that the two teams had never before met in football, the rivalry between Middle Tennessee and North Texas became an instant classic in the fledgling Sun Belt Conference starting in 2001. Now that both teams have moved to Conference USA, there is no reason to believe that the intensity of the rivalry will abate.



Middle Tennessee (3-3, 1-1 in C-USA) and North Texas (2-3, 0-1) will clash at 6 PM on Saturday evening at NTU. The game will not be televised, but will be carried live on the Blue Raider Radio Network. Chip Walters, long-time MT play-by-play announcer, will be joined by former Blue Raider and NFL quarterback Kelly Holcomb, who will offer his insight to the game.

The BRN broadcast will be carried by WGNS Radio in Murfreesboro (1450-AM, 102.5-FM), and will also be available on GoBlueRaiders.com.

Both teams are coming off losses in their C-USA games last week, with pre-season favorite East Carolina holding off the Blue Raiders 24-17 at Floyd Stadium, and UNT falling at Tulane, 24-21.

Saturday's clash will be the 13th time the two schools have met in football, and will continue a rivalry that highlighted the Sun Belt Conference in its early football years.

The Blue Raiders captured last year's game in Murfreesboro, as quarterback Logan Kilgore passed for 349 yards and two touchdowns, and sprinted 45 yards for a third score. He threw touchdowns passes of 72 and 51 yards to Kyle Griswold, and hit Anthony Amos on another scoring strike of 18 yards as MT built a 24-0 halftime lead en-route to a 38-21 victory.

Both teams will limp into Saturday's game with assorted nicks and dings, primarily among linemen, both offensive and defensive, so play in the trenches will be key once again.

"I think we are a very tough football team, and I think we are a very mentally tough football team," declared Stockstill. "I think that has a lot to do with our success."

Stockstill was high in his praise of the North Texas football team this year.

"They are very similar to us in many ways. They are fast and athletic, and are much improved in the kicking game. They returned a kickoff for a touchdown against Georgia, and blocked a punt in the same game for another. They created five turnovers against Ball State. That is a very active defense."

While this will be a familiar foe for the Blue Raiders, it is one that has caused MT problems in years past, and one that pulled a monumental upset the very first time the two teams played, 12 years ago in the Sun Belt opener for both teams. It was also a hint of things to come.

Middle Tennessee had opened that 2001 season with a resounding 37-28 thumping of Vanderbilt in Nashville, followed that with a 54-17 pounding of Troy in Murfreesboro, then won Sun Belt road games at Louisiana-Lafayette and Louisiana-Monroe before setting NCAA records with a 70-58 win over Idaho in Murfreesboro.

The 5-0 Blue Raiders, a prohibitive favorite, then went to Denton to play the winless Mean Green, who stunned MT with a 24-21 upset win and turned their own season around, finishing with a 5-6 record. The Blue Raiders finished their season with an 8-3 record, losing only at Ole Miss and at LSU the rest of the way.

Both teams had 5-1 records in Sun Belt play, but it was the Mean Green that was invited to play in the New Orleans Bowl with a losing record because they had won the head-to-head battle.

When Stockstill arrived in 2006, his first Blue Raider team quickly took care of that losing streak, posting a convincing 35-0 triumph in Denton. His current record vs. North Texas is 5-2, including a 38-21 win in Murfreesboro last fall.

Middle Tennessee's next game on the schedule will be at home, as the Blue Raiders host Marshall in the annual Blackout game on Thursday night, October 24th.

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