

UNC Rolls Past Middle Tennessee, 40-20

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Romar Morris scored twice to help North Carolina run out to a big lead and beat Middle Tennessee 40-20 on Saturday. Bryn Renner threw for 339 yards and a touchdown for the Tar Heels (1-1), who led all day to regroup after a loss at highly ranked South Carolina. North Carolina scored the first 23 points, had 511 yards and never let the Blue Raiders (1-1) get closer than 13 points after halftime.

Jordan Parker ran for a touchdown and Jared Singletary returned a fumble for a score early in the fourth quarter that brought Middle Tennessee to within 26-13. But the Blue Raiders committed four turnovers, had their offense go dormant in the first half and struggled to consistently slow the Tar Heels' no-huddle spread offense.

Renner found Quinshad Davis for an 18-yard touchdown shortly after Singletary's return to retake momentum, helping UNC win its third straight home opener.

North Carolina entered the year with some buzz after tying for the Atlantic Coast Conference's Coastal Division title, though NCAA sanctions kept the Tar Heels out of the league title game.

Some of that dwindled during their 27-10 loss to the Gamecocks in their worst offensive showing in 13 games under Larry Fedora, though some of that could be attributed to a conservative game plan against Gamecocks star defensive end Jadeveon Clowney.

North Carolina looked much more aggressive Saturday, with Renner looking downfield frequently and connecting on 59- and 43-yard passes in the first half after failing to complete one of more than 24 yards in the opener.

The Tar Heels' defense also showed some improvement in that opening half. After allowing the Blue Raiders to gain 78 yards in the game's first drive, UNC held Middle Tennessee to 21 yards for the rest of the half.

Morris got the Tar Heels on the board with a 26-yard run around the left side, then scored again from a yard out late in the second as UNC carried a 23-0 lead into halftime.

Middle Tennessee came into the game with plenty of confidence after beating Georgia Tech -- which ended up in the ACC championship game in UNC's place -- on the road last year. But hopes of earning another big road win against an ACC opponent ended amid a series of mistakes on an error-filled day.

Middle Tennessee quarterback Logan Kilgore, who started despite a shoulder injury suffered last week against Western Carolina, threw three interceptions. The first came in the end zone on a one-handed grab by UNC's Tre Boston on an opening drive that had pushed all the way to the 1-yard line, while another came when Darien Rankin jumped the route around the 10 to end a promising drive midway through the third.

The Blue Raiders also committed a roughing-the-punter penalty to extend a UNC drive that ended with a field goal in the third. Kilgore threw for 211 yards on 21-for-35 passing, while Parker ran for 109 yards for Middle Tennessee.

Photo Courtesy: Romar Morris, UNC Athletics