



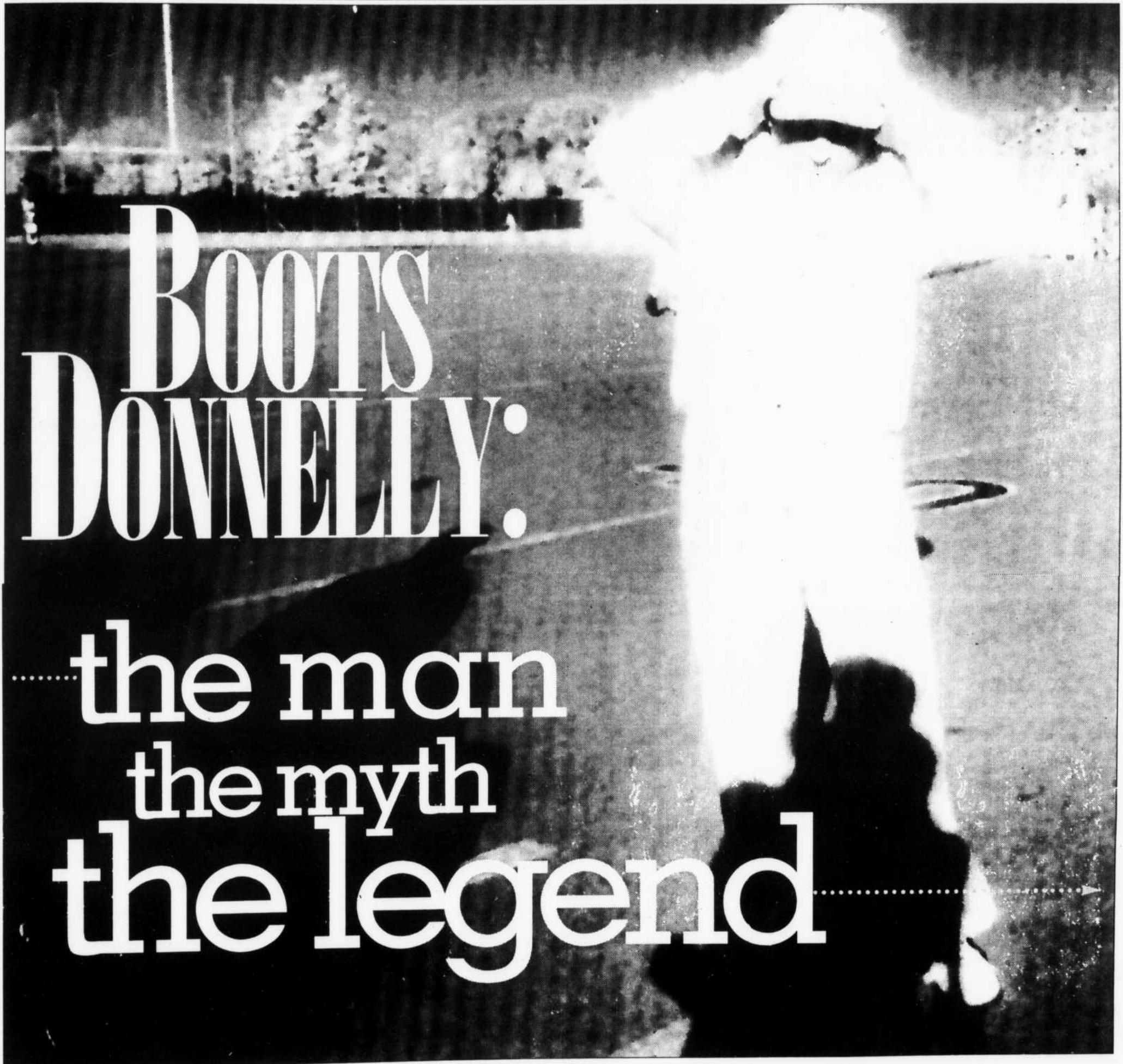
SIDELINES



Volume 74

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Murfreesboro, TN



BOOTS DONNELLY:

the man
the myth
the legend

the tale of a legend



a compilation of and tribute
to the dedication of
James "Boots" Donnelly

1979-1998

Donnelly says 'It's time to produce'

Henry Fennell/Sept. 7, 1979

"It's time to produce," MTSU head football coach Boots Donnelly said. "That's what it's all about."

The time Donnelly refers to is Saturday night at 7:30 p.m. on Horace Jones Field. The date and the time mark the beginning of a new era in Blue Raider football.

It's Donnelly's inaugural season at the helm of the Blue Raider fortunes. A season that has been the object of much speculation. The excitement surrounding the '79 effort is evident in the fact a near capacity crowd is expected for the opener. The capacity mark has not been approached in several seasons here.

A special promotion by the chamber of commerce and local industry, plus a boost in season ticket sales has helped swell the opening game figure to its largest total in a number of years.

The opposition for the much awaited opener is the University of North Alabama. UNA has the strength on paper to provide strong opposition to the home team. The Lions return no less than 18 starters from a squad that finished with a 7-2-1 record for 1978.

The team's base of returning starters includes nine players on both the offensive and defensive side. UNA head coach Wayne Grubb has made it clear he is expecting strength the past Saturday in their season opener by crushing Langston College of Oklahoma, 28-7. In that game, UNA's defense allowed Langston only two first downs for the entire contest.

MTSU offensive coordinator Bubba Hooker scouted the contest and

reported UNA to be an experienced team with more than adequate size throughout the lineup, plus great strength at quarterback.

John Grow, a transfer from the University of Kentucky, handles the offensive controls for UNA.

"We're going to have to control their quarterback," Hooker said.

UNA's opener was also marked by the emergence of a freshman running back flash. First year fullback Milton Taylor was pressed into action after regular fullback Stanley Green suffered a shipped bone in his hand. Taylor responded with 108 yards on 18 carries. The effort was rewarded with much praise by the Lion's coaching staff.

Grubb has stated he expects no pushover Saturday night. "I expect MTSU will be at a very emotional level," Grubb said. "We're going to be tested. I've heard they're expecting a sellout, so we can expect a very vocal and hostile crowd."

Grubb was also concerned over the fact his staff had been unable to scout the Raiders. The head coach indicated he would prepare his team as if they were playing the Austin Peay teams of the past two years.

MTSU's Donnelly seemed much less concerned about the opposition than of his own team's attitude towards Saturday's contest.

"I couldn't give a nickel less about UNA," Donnelly said. "What we want is 100 percent on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. If that happens, we'll be alright on Saturday."

Donnelly has yet to predict the first win, the first touchdown or even the first first-down for his young team. However he did go this far in describing the team's outlook: "I think you'll be proud of this team. I think you will see effort, enthusiasm and blunders. We're looking for the effort from people who like to play."

Thursday's report had the Raiders in good physical shape, with the exception of some minor, nagging injuries. There were no reported injuries to any key players.

The kicking situation, which had been unclear throughout fall work, has now been settled. Senior guard Bill Ming will double as the team's punter, despite the coaching staff's preference not to have an offensive lineman handling that chore.

Gerald Robinson, a senior who handled the place kicking chores last season, has reclaimed the spot for his final year.

James McClellan has laid claim to the right defensive end spot.

McClellan has fought an uphill battle to reclaim his starting spot of a year ago, after missing all of spring practice with an injury.

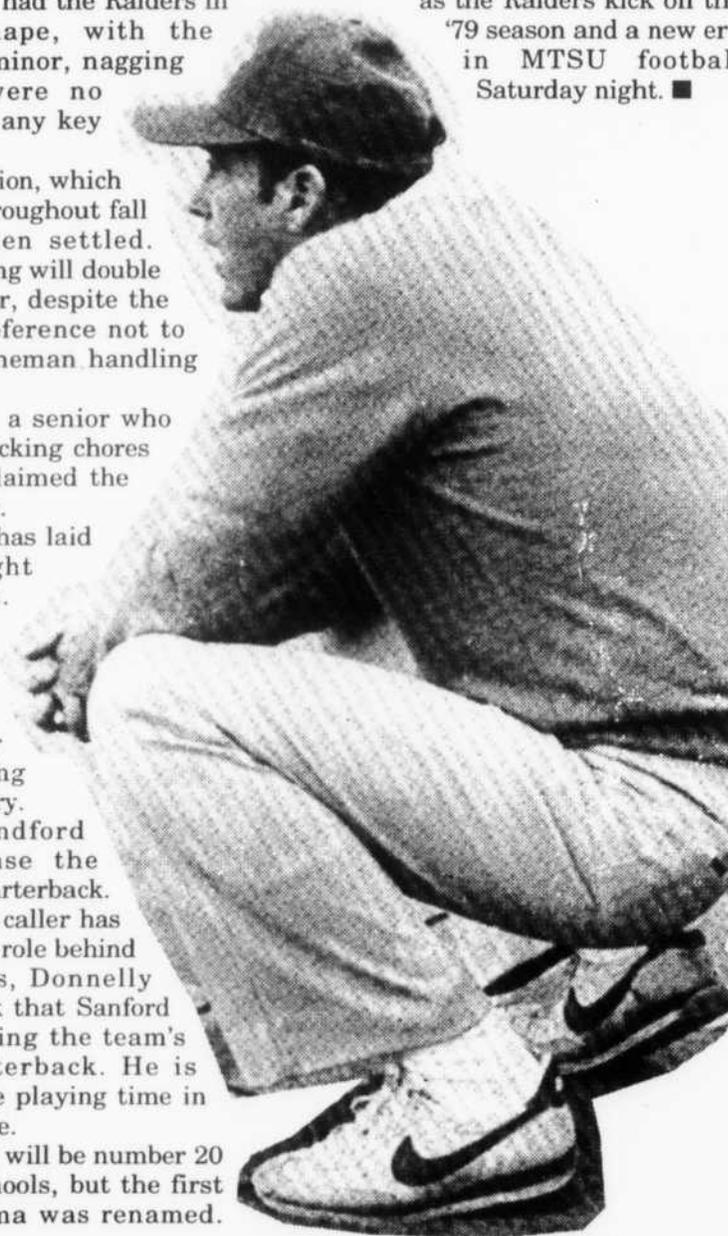
Brown Sandford continues to please the coaching staff at quarterback. The freshman signal caller has moved into a backup role behind starter Gus Purvis, Donnelly made note this week that Sanford was close to becoming the team's number one quarterback. He is expected to get some playing time in Saturday nights game.

Saturday's contest will be number 20 between the two schools, but the first since North Alabama was renamed.

UNA was known as Florence State before the change. MTSU leads the series with a 15-4 win-loss record. The Raiders won the last meeting, 31-10 in 1972.

The '79 squad will be seeking to break a seven game losing streak inherited from the 1978 season.

Speculation will give way to reality as the Raiders kick off the '79 season and a new era in MTSU football Saturday night. ■



**"What we want is
100 percent on
Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday,
Thursday and
Friday. If that
happens, we'll be
alright on Saturday.**

head coach Boots Donnelly



Donnelly announces resignation

Mark Owens/Oct. 1, 1998
Athletic Media Relations

James (Boots) Donnelly announced tonight that he will be stepping down as head football coach at Middle Tennessee State University effective at the end of the 1998 season.

Donnelly, who is synonymous with winning football, is in his 22 year as a head coach and his 20 at Middle Tennessee.

"People are probably wondering why I am stepping down at this particular point in the season. But I feel it is the best time for this program," Donnelly stated. "With the move to I-A in football next year, it gives the administration plenty of time to find a new coach, and have him in place for the upcoming recruiting season."

Donnelly, who enters this weeks game with an overall record of 150-92-1 in 22 years, will remain with the athletic department following the conclusion of the football season.

"Coach Donnelly has had a great career at MTSU," athletic director Lee Fowler said. "His success as a football coach at Middle Tennessee is the main reason we're making the jump to I-A next year. He has established a solid program that wins, graduates players and prepares student-athletes to be successful in life. He will be sorely missed as a football coach and teacher."

The eighth winningest coach in Division I-AA history, Donnelly was the recipient of the "Contributions to Football Award" from Middle Tennessee Chapter of the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame in 1989. He was also inducted into the Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame in 1997.

"We appreciate the contributions Coach Donnelly has given to MTSU as a player and coach," school president, Dr. James Walker said. "We look forward to having Boots as a part of the athletic department for many years to come."

An outstanding player at Middle Tennessee in the mid-1960s, Donnelly returned to his alma mater in 1978 to take over the reins of a once proud football tradition that had fallen on hard times. MTSU had gone through six straight losing seasons before Donnelly became head coach.

The Nashville native would go on to record 12 straight winning seasons, capture four Ohio Valley Championships. ■

Boots never lost integrity

Keith Ryan Cartwright
Oct. 1, 1998

Wednesday evening was one of the most solemn occasions in recent Blue Raider athletic history.

After 20 seasons at the helm of the MTSU football program, Boots Donnelly has decided to call it a career. Effective at the end of this season, Donnelly will step down as head coach of the Raiders.

The announcement was made at 8 p.m. after several department meetings as well as an emotional meeting between Donnelly and his assistants.

Donnelly's resignation ends a couple of years worth of speculation.

There were those who said only his ego was keeping him involved with the organization so that he could say that he coached a I-A team. Others thought athletics director Lee Fowler would replace him after his first year of I-A.

The actual arrogance, however, is with those who ignorantly tried to predict Donnelly's fate in Middle Tennessee.

But they all forgot one thing: Donnelly is a man who goes about his life in his own way. So it seems only fitting that Donnelly would choose the least expected time to end a career which ranks him as the eighth most winningest coach in I-AA history.

It all comes back to the first thing I ever wrote about Donnelly when I first arrived at MTSU last fall, "Boots Donnelly has never been one to mince words and he's not about to begin now."

The way I see it, Donnelly has always maintained his integrity.

He's always stood up to anything he deemed as his mistake. There was the time I spoke to him after last season's final game, ironically it was a loss to this week's opponent, Tennessee Tech. After the game, Donnelly told me that maybe it was time to evaluate how taught his players.

Never did he try to lay blame to a player for a loss if he thought better preparation by the coaching staff would have made a difference.

We all have our own Donnelly stories, but nonetheless, it was a sad time at the Murphy Center last

night. After the announcement was made, none of Donnelly's coaches, including Donnelly himself, could be found.

Though their cars remained in the parking lot well after the time they've all normally left, the men themselves remained



together.

No doubt, Donnelly chain-smoked more than a few cigarettes. But then again, the man in blue was entitled to do as he saw fit.

In the coming days, Donnelly will be talked about

on nearly every sports radio show, written about throughout the country and even mentioned on ESPN. I'm willingly to bet that one word not used to describe him will be graceful.

However, that's the way I'll always remember him. Donnelly was graceful enough

to turn in his resignation early enough so that a good quality coach could be put in place early enough to be effective during the recruiting season. Graceful enough to help lead a football team to the climax of I-A competition.

Yet Donnelly steps away from the game without disgracing himself by coaching at the I-A level just for the sake of saying he coached there. Why? Because he has too much

respect for the game he's been involved in for the better portion of his entire life.

Hopefully, he'll receive the respect he so deserves.

As Bob Hope said a million times, "Thanks for the memories." ■



Boots stirs up interest

Carol Stuart/Sept. 11, 1979

Over 12,500 people showed up at Horace Jones Field last Saturday night to witness the beginning of Boots Donnelly's "Return to Glory Days" at MTSU.

The city of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County became excited last week with Blue Raider fever, heavily promoting the game and the 1979 season. And, apparently, many MTSU students shrugged off their suitcases and donned their school spirit, as nearly 5,000 attended the game.

What would cause all this excitement over a team that had only one win and one tie last year, and sports 70 freshmen on this year's varsity squad? Donnelly is most likely the main reason for this new surge in MTSU football pride.

In a random survey taken by Sidelines before the game, there was strong evidence of enthusiasm for a winning team at MTSU under the man of the hour, James "Boots" Donnelly.

"There is no doubt in my mind; we are going to have a winner, maybe not this year, but in the next couple of years, we will have a winner," Murfreesboro citizen, Jimmy Jackson stated. "I know the man, and I know his assistant coaches. They are tough, they are hard workers and they know what football is about."

And football is the name of the game. Donnelly has proven his skill of teaching football while producing winners at Father Ryan High School in Nashville and at Austin Peay, where he led the Gobs to their first OVC championship.

"I think he'll really do a fine job. He had a pretty good record at Austin Peay and I believe he'll turn everything around here," Kevin Bromley commented.

Although most are looking forward to a good season this year, Craig Collins commented mainly about Donnelly and the future.

"In the future he probably will turn things around, as soon as he gets these freshmen developed," Collins said. ■

Boots looks to return Blue Raiders to glory

Henry Fennell/Aug. 2, 1979

The 1979 MTSU football media guide found its way to the Sidelines sports desk yesterday. On the outside, it looked like any number of press guides. First year head coach Boots Donnelly is pictured on the front along with former head coach, turned athletic director, Charles "Bubber" Murphy. The cover reads "Return to Glory," a promise of things to come from Boots. A predictable beginning to a press guide.

Traditional preseason comments are normally dry, predictable and under or overstated to serve a purpose. Donnelly's preseason comments on this year's Blue Raider squad may well be the overstated

to a serve a purpose, but they will never be called dry.

Donnelly on the defensive line: "Deplorable — There is not much personal pride in this group. Our defensive scheme is different and some just don't want to learn it. There is a decided lack of enthusiasm and just plain old desire to play the game."

Donnelly on defensive backs: "Our current secondary, the one we finished with in spring practice, could be the worst in the United States. There is a 99 percent chance that four incoming freshmen will start in the secondary this season."

Donnelly on the defense in general: "Like the snail darter, we are almost extinct. We have perhaps three players on defense who can win in the OVC. We did improve in Spring practice. However, we still have a

long, long way to go."

Donnelly on the offense: "Overall I'd say we have a fair offense."

The Blue Raiders coach calls his quarterbacks, Duane West and Gus Purvis, "tough individuals we can win with. Neither of them have exceptional ability, but both are tough competitors."

The Blue Raider football team for 1979 will contain only 28 non-first year players. A mere 10 lettermen on the offensive side and eight on the defense. A figure that seems to support Donnelly's concern.

See RETURN TO GLORY, page 7.

Like a fine wine, Boots mellows with age

Mike Jones/1984 Midlander

Kind of like wine that mellows with age, Boots Donnelly has also gotten better with age.

The Blue Raiders football skipper, in his fifth year at MTSU, led the team to an 8-2 record in 1983, the best record the team has posted since 1965. And like the taste of wine improves over the years, Donnelly's coaching records with the Blue Raiders have improved over the years.

After a couple of years of records drastically below the .500 mark, Donnelly and his staffers fashioned a 6-5 record in 1981, followed by an 8-3 mark in 1982.

Far above anything else, however,

Donnelly wants a winning football team at MTSU, and he will do it his way.

Support has been lacking for MTSU football over the recent years, but Donnelly forges onward, building a winning program and recruiting winning athletes in the same area as other local powers.

Sure, it's a lot of trouble, but in order to be a winner, you have to go out and make it happen. That's something nobody had really attempted to do here until Donnelly came along.

"I don't believe in being second to anyone," Donnelly said early in the season. "There is no such thing as complacency here on this football team. I would not stay here one day if I did not think we could win a national

championship. Being the best you can is nothing, winning is something."

People in Murfreesboro and at MTSU in particular, Donnelly says, have gotten to the point where they accept losing and that "doing the best you can" is all that's expected.

"people tell us to go out and do the best we can. They don't always expect us to win," Donnelly said. "The times when you win are the times when things happen around here. We don't worry when the phone rings all the time around here, it's when it doesn't ring that worries us."

And while the Blue Raiders have certainly reached a point of pride and accomplishment during Donnelly's stay, there is still one element lacking.

"The day we get the students to talk it up, the faculty to talk it up and the townspeople to talk it up will be a great day."

On being named the Ohio Valley Conference Coach of the Year by the league media association, Donnelly threw most of the credit to his hardworking staff.

"I think it's nice to be recognized by the media as doing a good job, but the award should go to the assistant coaches."

Speculation at the end of the season saw Donnelly as leaving the school to seek greener pastures in the form of a

See FINE WINE, page 7

Donnelly, Corwin pick up honors

Staff Report/Dec. 2, 1983

MTSU head football coach Boots Donnelly, who led the Blue Raiders to an 8-2 record this season, was named Ohio Valley Conference Coach of the Year by the OVC Media Association, it was announced yesterday.

Eight members of the Blue Raiders were named to the All-OVC squad, also selected by the 30-member group.

Donnelly, who just completed his fifth year as the MTSU head man, raised his collegiate coaching record to 39-34 with his third consecutive winning record.

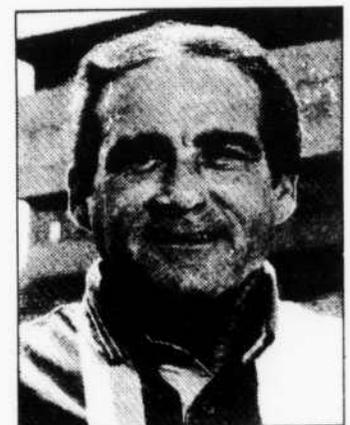
Quarterback Mickey Corwin, a junior, was named the OVC Offensive Player of the Year, along with being selected as the team's signal caller.

Also named to the team from MTSU were junior tailback Vince Hall, senior offensive guard Roger Carroll, flanker Marshan Jolly, placekicker Kelly Potter, defensive tackle Jeff Spencer, cornerback Steve Puryear and defensive end William Thomas. ■



The *Sidelines* staff would like to thank Boots for all of his hard work and dedication to the success of the Blue Raider football team.

All of the stories and photographs were compiled from the *Sidelines* library.



Donnelly makes his final stand



Boots passes Vandy

*Tony Arnold
Jan. 12, 1995*

MTSU got a late Christmas present of sorts on December 26 when it received word it was getting to keep Boots Donnelly as head football coach.

Donnelly, who has been coaching at his alma mater since 1979, withdrew his name from contention for the vacant Vanderbilt head coaching job. He cited a lengthy search process as one of his major reasons.

"My first responsibility is to the football program at Middle Tennessee," Donnelly said. "I don't feel that it is fair for me to leave my players, my staff and the administration in limbo any longer."

Donnelly had been dubbed a leading candidate for the job after Gerry DiNardo left his post at Vandy for Louisiana State. He served as an assistant at Vanderbilt, located in his hometown of Nashville, in 1976.

"I would like to thank Paul

Hoolahan (Vandy's Athletics Director) for considering me and wish Vanderbilt good luck in its selection," Donnelly said.

Vandy eventually chose Cleveland Browns quarterback coach Rod Dowhower.

Donnelly had interviewed with other universities in the past but remained at MTSU with hopes of pushing the current I-AA program onto the Division I-A level.

"I think this is a great university and I work for a president (Dr. James Walker) that loves football," Donnelly said. "This is a great community and my biggest concern right now is recruiting and getting us back to championship level in our conference and back into the playoffs."

Donnelly led the Blue Raiders into the playoffs for the seventh time this past season and ended the year with a 8-3-1 record. In his tenure at MTSU, his Raider squads have amassed a 132-74-1 record. ■

TSWA Coach of the Year

*Rob Nunley
Feb. 9, 1995*

Tennessee's sports media honored the MTSU football program recently by voting head coach Boots Donnelly state college football coach of the year.

This is the second time that Donnelly has received the award, which was started by the Tennessee Sportswriters Association in 1988.

In his 16 years as coach of the Blue Raiders, Donnelly has a record of 118-67-1, including seven trips to the playoffs and four OVC titles. Last year, the Raiders finished with an overall record of 8-3-1, good enough for second in the OVC, before losing to the Thundering Herd from Marshall University in the first round of the NCAA division I-AA playoffs.

See COACH, page 7.

CONGRATULATIONS

Coach Boots Donnelly '65, '67 for 20 great years



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| YEAR | POSITION | W-L-T |
|---------|---|--------|
| 1966-73 | ASSISTANT COACH, FATHER RYAN HIGH SCHOOL | |
| 1974 | HEAD COACH, FATHER RYAN HIGH SCHOOL | 13-0-0 |
| 1975 | HEAD COACH, FATHER RYAN HIGH SCHOOL | 8-1-0 |
| 1976 | ASSISTANT COACH, VANDERBILT | |
| 1977 | HEAD COACH, AUSTIN PEAY (OVC CHAMPION) | 8-3-0 |
| 1978 | HEAD COACH, AUSTIN PEAY | 6-4-0 |
| 1979 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 1-9-0 |
| 1980 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 2-8-0 |
| 1981 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 6-5-0 |
| 1982 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 8-3-0 |
| 1983 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 8-2-0 |
| 1984 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 11-3-0 |
| 1985 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE (OVC CHAMP) | 11-1-0 |
| 1986 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 6-5-0 |
| 1987 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 6-5-0 |
| 1988 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 7-4-0 |
| 1989 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE (OVC CHAMP) | 8-4-0 |
| 1990 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE (OVC Co-CHAMP) | 11-2-0 |
| 1991 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 9-4-0 |
| 1992 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE (OVC CHAMP) | 10-3-0 |
| 1993 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 5-6-0 |
| 1994 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 8-3-1 |
| 1995 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 7-4-0 |
| 1996 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 6-5-0 |
| 1997 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 4-6-0 |
| 1998 | HEAD COACH, MIDDLE TENNESSEE | 5-5-0 |

22-YEAR CAREER RECORD AS
A COLLEGIATE HEAD COACH **154-92-1**

HONORS: NASHVILLE INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (FATHER RYAN HIGH SCHOOL)—1960; OVC COACH OF THE YEAR (AUSTIN PEAY)—1977; OVC Co-COACH OF THE YEAR (MTSU)—1983; NCAA REGION 3 COACH OF THE YEAR (MTSU)—1984; OVC COACH OF THE YEAR (MTSU), NCAA REGION 3 COACH OF THE YEAR—1985; TENNESSEE SPORTS WRITERS COACH OF THE YEAR—1988; OVC COACH OF THE YEAR (MTSU), NATIONAL FOOTBALL FOUNDATION "CONTRIBUTION TO FOOTBALL" AWARD—1989; TENNESSEE SPORTS WRITERS COACH OF THE YEAR—1994; TENNESSEE SPORTS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE—1997

RETURN TO GLORY

continued from page 4

Donnelly does look to be understating his team's ability at every opportunity, but to pull a 1-9-1 team of 1978 to a winning season in 1979 will take an incredible effort on the part of both the players and the coaches.

Despite the moans and groans from the new Blue Raider chief, there are two paragraphs in this year's press guide that might be more revealing than any scouting

report. The read:

"The only enjoyment I get out of football is winning," says Donnelly. "We believe that we can win this season. If we didn't believe that, we wouldn't have come here. Patience is a virtue and I don't have it, so we'll have to win quickly to satisfy me.

"Some people say you learn by losing," He continued. "I don't understand that. There will be no one on this team who enjoys losing. I promise you that. Winning is what makes the world go round." ■

FINE WINE

continued from page 5

more lucrative coaching position. He discounts this.

"We will not leave this university unless somebody puts bags full of money on my desk — and no one has done that."

But there is certainly credit that should go to the entire staff, Donnelly's importance cannot be underestimated.

To MTSU football, Boots Donnelly is the man. ■

COACH

continued from page 6

Coach Donnelly gathered a total of 77 points and 11 first-place votes out of a possible 21, ahead of Tennessee's Phil Fulmer, who collected 41 points and four first-place votes.

"It's gratifying to win an award, but it's something special to win one from the Tennessee SportsWriter's Association," Donnelly said.

"Anytime Middle Tennessee's football program is recognized in any way it's good for the school and the program."

Coach Donnelly stated the benefits that the exposure of receiving an award can have

for a program.

"Hopefully if a young man is interested in coming here he will read about this and become more interested in this football program and its coaches," Donnelly said. "It will never hurt the program to get this kind of recognition."

Though thankful for the award, coach Donnelly was also very modest, refusing to take credit for the program's success.

"This is a great reflection on the players and coaching staff," he said. "I'm very humbled by it but I'm appreciative.

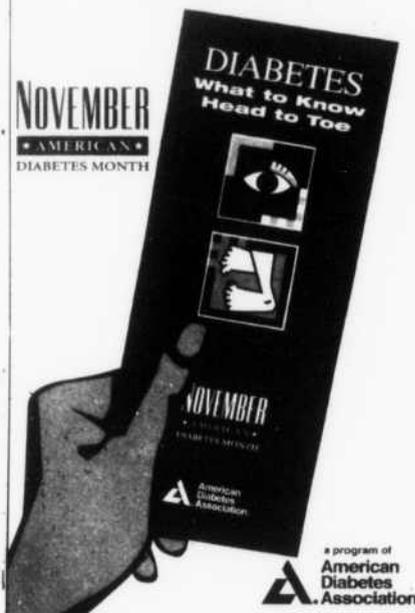
"You have to be proud of players and coaching staff that put you in that position." ■

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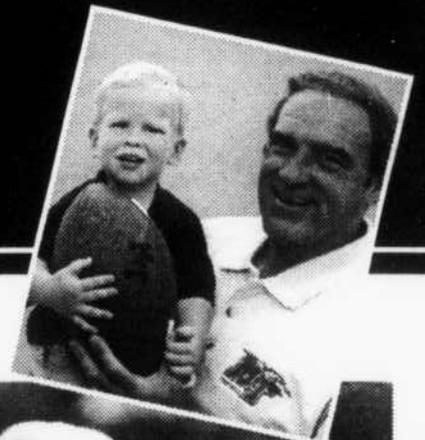


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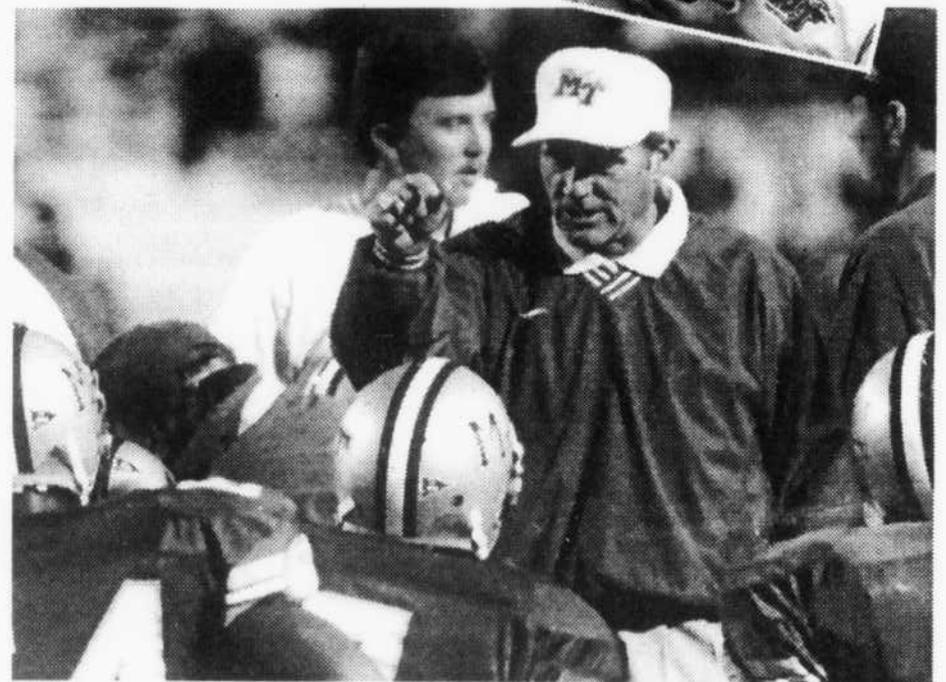
Thanks Boots!

...for your efforts on behalf of MTSU and for mentoring so many young men during your extraordinary coaching career.



Using your words:

For twenty years you've "stayed in the buggy when the horse reared up" and "never spit out the bit." It's because of you that Middle Tennessee is moving to Division 1-A. You've made Blue Raider football "top-shelf Broadway!"



- Five OVC Championships
- Three-time OVC Coach of the Year
- Ten national top-25 finishes
- Seven NCAA Playoff appearances
- MTSU Sports Hall of Fame, 1995
- Tennessee Sports Hall of Fame, 1997

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT