Last season was one of the most dismal campaigns in the history of Miami University Football. The RedHawks finished the season with a record of 1-11, their only victory coming against Toledo, 31-24, at Yeager Stadium late in the season.

Miami lost its first two games of the season, 42-0 against Kentucky at Paul Brown Stadium and 48-0 on the road against Boise State. In their third game of the season the RedHawks gave up the first 35 points of the game to Western Michigan. Finally, after being out-scored 135-0 to open the season, Miami got on the board with a 14-yard pass from quarterback Daniel Raudebaugh to Eugene Harris.

Of course, the extra point kick was blocked.

All that, however, is ancient history. This season the RedHawks are a different breed, and they have also doubled last season's win total sitting at 2-1 heading into today's road contest with Missouri.

The RedHawks opened the season by not embarrassing itself against Florida in The Swamp. In fact, despite the Gators' 34-12 victory it was Florida that spent the week after the game nervous

about the future. The Gators had problems with the center-quarterback exchange as center Mike Pouncey rolled numerous shotgun snaps back to quarterback John Brantley. Miami led 3-0 after the first quarter and was held to just 41 total yards through three quarters.

Miami followed its decent showing against Florida by defeating Eastern Michigan, 28-21, in its home opener before drilling Colorado State, 31-10, last week.

Why the RedHawks have won two of their first three games after winning just one game all last season is not a mystery. In fact the numbers tell the story with certainty.

In 2009 the RedHawks were last in the Mid-American Conference in points per game by averaging 15.6. This season they have scored 23.7 points per game. Last year the RedHawks were 11th in the conference in scoring defense, giving up 34.2 points per contest. This year they have given up 21.7. In ’09 Miami was last in the MAC in turnover margin at minus-24. This year they are tied with Toledo for the conference lead at plus-five.

The RedHawks have improved their penalty yards per game (50.4 in ’09, 38.7 in ’10), sacks allowed (58 total, 4.8 per game last season, nine in three games, 3.0 per contest, this year) and first downs allowed (14 per game this season, 20 per game in ’09) as well as quite a few other statistics.

Last season the RedHawks rushed for just 841 yards as a team, this season they have 253 rushing yards in three games. In ’09 Miami picked off just six passes, they have five already this year.

Across the board the RedHawks have been a better football team, and head coach Michael Haywood thinks he has an idea why.

Since Haywood took over the program prior to the 2009 season he has been stressing how he has to “change the culture” of Miami football. One of his ideas, an idea he implemented this season following a conversation with Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald, is to move his practices from 2:30 in the afternoon to very early in the morning. The problem was that he had to excuse players early from practice, or for the entire practice, for academic reasons.

Last season the RedHawks would start their team and position meetings at 2:30 and end up practicing until about 6 p.m. This year, following Fitzgerald’s advice, things are much different. On Tuesday Miami starts at 6:30 a.m. Wednesday they begin at 6 a.m. and Thursday at 6:50 a.m.

“We were sitting down somewhere talking,” Haywood said of his conversation with Fitzgerald. “I explained to him the problems we were having from an academic standpoint and not having our players there towards the end of practice. He explained that he had some of those difficulties when he first took over at Northwestern and they went to morning practices. It’s been unbelievable how much better we practice, how fresh we are in the morning. And we don’t have any conflict with classes, tutors or anything along those lines.”

Along with having his players all present for practice, the early schedule has a few extra benefits.

“It’s obvious, when the guys walk in in the morning, who has stayed up late at night,” Haywood explained. They come in sleepy-eyed, they come in dragging and they don’t practice very well. And last week was a prime example. Those guys (who did not practice well) did not touch the field for one play.”

It also keeps his team fresh on game day.

“Between Thursday’s practice and the time they walked on the field Saturday they had 50 ½ hours without running. So you get a fresher football team,” Haywood said.

Miami faces a big test today at Missouri, but regardless of the results Haywood thinks his

RedHawks are making huge strides towards his main goal, changing the culture.

“We’ve done a good job socially and academically, and now we’re trying to change things to the old ways here in Miami,” he said. “And we’re making some changes. We’re definitely not where we should be but we’re definitely getting better each and every week.

“Our players are starting to believe in themselves, believe in their teammates as well as their coaches. We’re still not where we should be, but we’re definitely getting better every week.”