Blue Raiders Win Thriller

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Brett Carroll plated the winning run, scoring all the way from first on a sacrifice bunt and a throwing error to give Middle Tennessee a 7-6 victory over Tennessee Tech Wednesday afternoon at Reese Smith Field.

The Blue Raiders came from behind twice in the game, eliminating a 4-0 deficit and then tying the contest at six before taking the victory in the ninth. Freshman Jeff Kasser entered the game in the eighth with two on and two outs and got out of the jam, then worked a scoreless ninth to get the win on the mound.

Middle Tennessee and Tennessee Tech were tied at six in the bottom of the ninth when Carroll drew a leadoff walk from TTU reliever Cooper Eddy. The Golden Eagles then made a pitching change, bringing in Brian Driskell to face pinch-hitter Derek Phillips.

Phillips laid down a terrific sacrifice bunt up the third-base line. TTU third baseman Brent Bilodeau made the play, but with no one covered third base. Carroll hit second and never stopped, heading toward third as Tech shortstop Casey Benjamin ran even with Carroll toward the bag.

TTU first baseman Josh Eye's throw was high, sailing over Benjamin's head and down the leftfield line. Carroll slid headfirst into third, popped up and headed for the plate with the winning run in a one-run thriller for the Blue Raiders.

Middle Tennessee trailed 4-0 after two innings but scored twice in the third and three times in the sixth to take the lead. But Tennessee Tech came back with two runs in the seventh to take back the lead before the Blue Raiders knotted the score again with a run in the bottom of the seventh.

The visiting Golden Eagles jumped out to a quick lead after Ben Shannon and Cole Helms drew

walks to leadoff the contest. Benjamin, who entered the game batting .500 on the season, singled to right to score Shannon, but Helms was thrown out trying to advance to third. Blue Raider starter BJ Church, however, worked his way out of further trouble with a strikeout and a groundout.

Tennessee Tech did more damage in the second when Britt Clubb singled with one out and Phillip Hatch walked. Helms drove in a run with a two-out single to left before Benjamin drove a ball to deep leftcenter field. Chuck Akers and Clif Thomas ran into each other trying to make the play, with Thomas dropping the ball. Benjamin hustled it into a triple, scoring two for a 4-0 TTU lead.

The Blue Raiders got on the board in the third, as Chad Cooper was hit by the pitch and Thomas reached on a catcher's interference. Carroll lined out, Jerry Knox grounded out and Josh Archer doubled in both runners, cutting the deficit to 4-2.

Middle Tennessee took the lead in the sixth with three runs, highlighted by a bases clearing triple from Cooper.

Jeff Beachum drew a two-out walk, his second free pass of the game, and Troy Harp singled to right. Akers then singled to left to load the bases before Cooper lined a 2-0 pitch into the right-centerfield gap, clearing the bases and giving the Blue Raiders the lead.

But Tennessee Tech came right back in the next half inning to regain the lead.

Helms singled with one out before Benjamin laid down a perfect bunt-for-a-hit down the third base line, giving Carroll no chance on the play. A strikeout gave Blue Raider hurler Danny Borne a chance to get out of the inning unharmed, but Carlos Martin beat out a chopper up the middle to load the bases. Bilodeau drove in a pair with a single to left, giving the Golden Eagles a 6-5 advantage.

Again the Blue Raiders would erase the deficit, with Carroll leading off the bottom of the seventh with a single. After a Knox walk and a strikeout, Shane Kemp lined a single up the middle, plating Carroll with the tying run.

Borne got himself into another jam in the eighth with a walk and a bunt single, a disputed call by Middle Tennessee head coach Steve Peterson as Beachum looked to have picked up the ball and touched the base before the runner hit the bag.

Shannon then hit into a doubleplay, as the runner was called out at second for interference. Kasser then entered the contest to face Helms and promptly fell behind 3-0, but came back with a fastball and two straight curveballs, getting Helms swinging to get out of the jam.

Kasser (1-0) got the final four outs of the game to get the win, striking out two and giving up one hit. Church started and struggled, walking four in two-plus innings of work before giving way to Chase Swing. Swing did another excellent job in relief, allowing one hit and striking out three in three innings.

TTU starter Collins Hughes allowed five runs, three earned, on six hits in 5.2 innings and departed after Cooper's triple in the sixth and his 104th pitch of the contest. Eddy (0-2) took the loss, giving up two runs, one earned, in 2.1 innings. Eddy walked two and struck out three, allowing just two hits.

The Blue Raiders begin Sun Belt Conference play this weekend with a three-game series against New Mexico State at Reese Smith Field. First pitch Friday is set for 7 p.m., with Saturday and Sunday games beginning at 2 p.m. and 1 p.m., respectively.

GAME NOTES

The game was pushed back one hour to 4 p.m. because of Wednesday morning's bad weather ... Freshman BJ Church got his second start of the season Wednesday against Tennessee Tech ... Brett Carroll extended his hitting streak to four games with a single in the first ... Troy Harp made his hitting streak four games with a single in the sixth ... The Blue Raiders evened their record at 3-3 in one-run games this season.

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