

Raider Rally Falls Short

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee scored five runs over the final two innings, but it was too little too late, as Florida International took an 11-7 victory Friday night at Reese Smith Field in the first of a three-game Sun Belt series.

The Blue Raiders trailed 10-2 heading into the bottom of the eighth before a trio of homers cut the lead to four. But the visiting Panthers added a run in the ninth before another Blue Raider home run in the ninth provided the final margin.

Josh Archer, Nate Jagers and Shane Kemp all homered in the eighth for the Blue Raiders, and Archer added a solo shot in the ninth, his fourth in three games, but Middle Tennessee began its rally too late.

FIU (26-9, 5-2 Sun Belt) got two runs in the first, added one in the second and third and plated four more runs in the fifth, chasing Blue Raider starter Steve Kline from the contest.

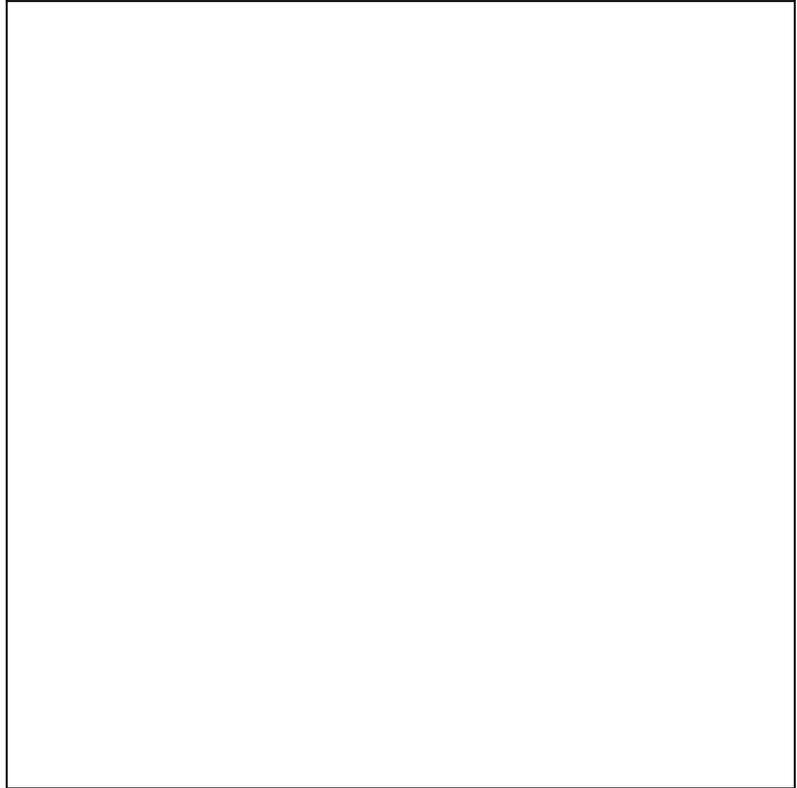
Panther leadoff hitter Luis Rivera set the tone with a leadoff single and later scored on Bryan Pullin's single. Ricardo Nanita drove in the second run of the contest with a sacrifice fly to left for a 2-0 FIU lead.

Rivera's leadoff double down the leftfield line to start the third and scored on Pullin's groundout.

Middle Tennessee (12-16, 2-5) got on the board in the bottom of the inning, as Chuck Akers walked and scored on Brett Carroll's double to rightcenter.

A solo home run to leftcenter from FIU's Skipton Adams made it 4-1, but a Chris LeGuenec single and Jagers double cut the deficit to two again for the Blue Raiders.

The Panthers' big inning came in the fifth, as eight hitters came to plate with four scoring. Rivera bunted his way own to leadoff the inning and scored on Pullin's single to center. Nanita's double off



the base of the wall in center plated Pullin, and catcher Michael New drove in a pair of runs with a double just inside the third base bag off Middle Tennessee reliever Chase Swing for an 8-2 FIU edge.

Michael Lopez plated another Panther run with a sacrifice fly in the sixth, and Yahmed Yema's solo shot in the seventh made it 10-2 FIU.

The bottom of the seventh summed up Middle Tennessee's fortunes in the contest, as Marcus Taylor beat out an infield single and Akers single to center to put two on with one out. Carroll grounded hard up the middle but right to FIU second baseman David San Juan, who flipped to Rivera to start a 4-6-3 inning-ending doubleplay.

Archer led off the eighth with a solo blast just over the leftfield wall. After another LeGuenec single, Jagers belted a two-run shot that landed on top of the restrooms in leftcenter, cutting the FIU lead to 10-5. Kemp then hit a solo shot to make it a four-run game, and after a single to right from Derek Phillips, Panther starter Joshua Banks was removed from the contest.

Akers bunted his way on with two outs against reliever Edgar Ramirez, putting two on for Carroll. But the sophomore got jammed a bit by Ramirez and flew out to center to end the inning.

Archer's leadoff homer in the ninth cleared the wall in rightcenter for Middle Tennessee's final run of the contest. The sophomore extended his hitting streak to 11 games and has four round-trippers in his last three contests after not homering in 20 games.

Kline (3-2) suffered the loss, allowing seven runs on 10 hits in 4.2 innings of work, tying his shortest stint of the season, also set at Southwest Missouri State. Swing gave up three runs on three hits in 2.1 frames, while Steven Kines worked the final two innings, allowing a single run.

Banks (6-1) allowed six runs on 14 hits in 7.1 innings and was visibly tired before being removed from the contest. Banks struck out nine in the first five innings. Ramirez got the final five outs, giving up one run on two hits.

Archer and Jagers both had three hits to pace Middle Tennessee's 16-hit attack, while Akers and LeGuenec each had two hits.

Rivera had three hits in his first three at-bats of the contest for FIU, while Pullin and Nanita each added two hits, as did Yema and New. Pullin drove in three runs, with Nanita, Yema and New all driving in a pair for the winners.

The two teams play again Saturday at 2 p.m. and conclude the series Sunday at noon.

GAME NOTES

Chad Cooper was removed from the game in the seventh after jamming his hand while stealing in the first. Cooper went 0-for-2 in the contest, ending his 14-game hitting streak ... Josh Archer now owns the longest current hitting streak at 11 games, extending his streak with a single in the fifth ... Jeff Beachum beat out an infield single in the sixth to extend his hitting streak to nine games ... Chuck Akers made his hitting streak six games with a single in the seventh ... Troy Harp now has a

four-game streak after his single in the fourth.

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