Big Inning Sparks 6-4 Win

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - A pair of two-run homers broke a tie and provided Middle Tennessee with a four-run sixth-inning in a 6-4 victory over Florida International Saturday afternoon at Reese Smith Field.

The Blue Raiders (13-16, 3-5 Sun Belt) got two runs in the first, but visiting FIU came back to tie the score with single run in the fourth and sixth. But the home team used an error and a two-run shots from Brett Carroll and Shane Kemp to take a 6-2 lead and held on for the victory.

Junior John Williams (2-2) had his best outing of the season thus far, going all nine innings while allowing four runs, just one earned, on eight hits with seven strikeouts. The lefthander threw a minimum of pitches through the first seven innings before working out of jams in the eighth and ninth to get his second win of the season.

It was his first complete game this season and the first nine-inning complete game for the Blue Raiders this season. It was also Williams' first complete game since striking out 16 against Austin Peay in March 23 of last year.

Middle Tennessee started the game quickly with two runs in the bottom of the first, as Chuck Akers led off with a single and Marcus Taylor followed with another single. A walk to Nate Jaggers loaded the bases with no outs for Josh Archer, who single through the left side to plate one run. Chris LeGuenec then knocked in a run with a sacrifice fly to left, making it 2-0.

But FIU starter Luis Gazitua settled down and got out of the frame without further damage. Gazitua allowed only two hits over the next four innings until the Blue Raiders got to him in the sixth.

The Panthers (26-10, 5-3) got a run in the fourth when Skipton Adams singled with one out and Dennis Diaz followed with a single to right. Adams went to third on the play, as Taylor had trouble getting the ball out of his glove in right, then threw wildly passed Carroll at third, allowing the run to

score.

A leadoff double to left by Michael Lopez in the sixth gave FIU another scoring chance. Adam Summerell, moving up in the order when Bryan Pullin injured his forearm in pregame warm-ups, moved the runner to third with a groundout, and Ricardo Nanita drove in Lopez with a single up the middle, knotting the score at two.

LeGuenec led off the bottom of the sixth for the Blue Raiders with a grounder to FIU shortstop Luis Rivera, who booted the ball and opened the door against Gazitua. Carroll followed with a two-run line drive shot that just cleared the leftfield wall.

Jeff Beachum was next and found a hole through the leftside, extending his hitting streak to 10 games. Kemp then hit a low-and-inside breaking abll over the leftfield wall, giving the Blue Raiders and Williams a 6-2 edge and a little bit of breathing room

But the Panthers would claw their way back into the contest with single runs in the eighth and ninth, sending the tying run to the plate in both frames.

Rivera singled with one out in the eighth and Lopez followed with a walk. Summerell then singled sharply to right, but Taylor had trouble fielding the ball, allowing Rivera to score and putting runners on second and third.

After a trip to the mound by Blue Raider skipper Steve Peterson, Williams bore down, striking out Nanita and getting a groundout from Adams to end the threat.

Diaz began the ninth with a bunt that Williams fielded and flipped to Archer at first, but the sophomore first baseman could not hold on, allowing Diaz to reach. A Michael New single put runners on the corners with nobody out.

Williams got a groundout from Yahmed Yema, which plated Diaz, cutting the Blue Raider lead to two. Pinch-hitter Jimmy Bacon also grounded out before Williams struck out Rivera to end the contest and stop and six-game losing streak to the Panthers.

Kemp had two hits and a stolen base to lead the Blue Raiders. Carroll and Kemp each had two RBIs in the win.

Gazitua (1-1) took the loss, giving up six runs, five earned in five-plus inning while striking out six. Derek DeCarlo, FIU's normal Saturday starter, came on to toss three hitless innings, striking out five of the nine batters he faced. DeCarlo has been struggling with a hip injury and the Panthers coaching staff wanted to limit his work.

The two teams conclude the three-game series Sunday at noon at Reese Smith Field.

GAME NOTES

John Williams went all nine innings in the victory, his first complete game this season and the first nine-inning complete game for the Blue Raiders this season. It was also Williams' first complete game since striking out 16 against Austin Peay in March 23 of last year ... Middle Tennessee played

without Chad Cooper for the first time this season and will at least the next 10 days. Cooper dislocated the pinky finger and strained ligaments in his left (non-throwing hand) while sliding into second base in the first inning of Friday night's game ... Josh Archer extended his hitting streak to 12 games with a single in the first ... Jeff Beachum made his hitting streak 10 with a single in the sixth ... Chuck Akers extended his hitting streak to seven games with a leadoff single in the first ... Brett Carroll made his hitting streak six with a home run in the sixth.

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