Knox Gets Win in 7-6 Blue Raider Victory

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JONESBORO, Ark. - Derek Phillips drove in the winning run with a sacrifice fly in the ninth and Jerry Knox tossed 3.2 innings of work to get the win, as Middle Tennessee defeated Arkansas State, 7-6, Saturday afternoon at Tomlinson Field.

The game was tied three times and the teams combined for 24 hits in the contest, but it was the Blue Raiders who outlasted the home team to take the victory.

Knox came on in relief of Blue Raider starter John Williams in the sixth, getting an inning-ending doubleplay to get out of a jam. Knox allowed one run on three hits with four strikeouts to even his record at 2-2.

With the game tied at six, Nate Jaggers singled with one out in the ninth for the Blue Raiders and Josh Archer followed with a ground ball back to the pitcher that looked to be a sure doubleplay. But Kevin Cutler's throw sailed to second, bounding into rightcenter and allowing Jaggers to move to third with one out. Phillips then drove home the run with a sacrifice fly to left against ASU reliever Blake Ring for a 7-6 lead.

The Indians got a one-out single in the ninth from Matt Rogelstad, but Jeff Kasser, who came in the game as a defensive replacement in the eighth, made a nice play on a live drive by Zach Shipley for the second out. Dusty Sexton then lined out to right to end the game and give the Blue Raiders their first win of a conference series this season.

Williams deserved a better fate, as ASU scored three unearned runs in the first before the Blue Raiders settled down. Williams gave up five runs, two earned, on eight hits in 5.1 innings, striking out four with one walk.

Cutler (2-3) suffered the loss, giving up an unearned run on two hits in 2.2 innings of work. The righthander walked one and struck out one.

Cutler was the third of four Indian hurlers in the game. Karnie Vertz started and lasted just four innings. He gave up three runs on seven hits with four strikeouts, and was hit by a Phillips line drive in the fourth. Jon Dove came on in relief of Vertz, working 1.2 innings and allowing three runs, two earned, on four hits.

The Blue Raiders got on the board first for the second straight contest, as Jaggers and Archer both doubled with two outs in the first to give Middle Tennessee an early 1-0 lead.

The Indians got three unearned runs in their half of the first, as the Blue Raiders made two errors in the frame. Brad Hayes reached on an error by Jeff Beachum at shortstop to start the inning, and Rogelstad was hit by Williams with one out. After a strikeout, Sexton blooped a double into medium leftfield down the line, scoring two runs.

George Sterner then singled to right, scoring Sexton, with Sterner advancing to second when the cutoff throw to the plate from Archer was low and got by Phillips.

The Blue Raiders knotted the game in the fourth with four hits. Archer, Phillips and Brett Carroll all singled to load the bases with no outs, but Vertz got a strikeout of Shane Kemp. Kevin Suba, drawing his first start of the year, flied to deep right, plating Archer.

Chris LeGuenec then singled to right, driving home Phillips with the tying run. Middle Tennessee might have gotten more in the inning, but Carroll rounded the bag too far and was picked off on the throw back in from rightfielder Neal Chambers.

Middle Tennessee manufactured a run with a hit and an Indian error to take the lead in the fifth.

Chuck Akers singled with one out and Jaggers followed with a walk on four pitches. Akers then took off for third on the first pitch to Archer, stealing the base and scoring when the throw got away from ASU third baseman Hayes.

But the Indians knotted the score again in their half of the inning, as Blake Denischuk blasted a solo shot between the gap in left and dead centerfield for his second round-tripper in two games.

Carroll doubled just inside the rightfield line to leadoff the sixth, and Kemp followed with a beautiful bunt single down the third base line. After a strikeout, LeGuenec plated Carroll with a sacrifice fly to right. Kemp then stole second and was driven home on Beachum's second single of the day for a 6-4 Blue Raider edge.

Arkansas State got a run back in the bottom of the sixth and could have gotten more if not for good bullpen work from Knox. Sterner led off with a solo home run to left field, cutting the Blue Raider lead to 6-5. One-out singles from Brent Cramer and Josh Allison sent the Blue Raiders to the pen, and Knox came in to get a 6-4-3 doubleplay from Hayes, ending the inning and the threat.

Leadoff walks always come back to hurt you, and one did in the seventh. Denischuk drew a leadoff free pass from Knox, went to second on a wild pitch and scored on Shipley's single to center, knotting the game at six, the third tie of the contest.

ASU had a chance to take the lead in the eighth when pinch-hitter Monte Douglas singled with one out and advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt by Allison. Hayes hit a deep fly ball to rightcenter, but Kemp was able to run it down and keep the game tied at six.

The Blue Raiders upped their mark to 12-2 against Arkansas State and Arkansas Little-Rock since joining the Sun Belt Conference three years ago, including 6-2 versus the Indians.

The two teams conclude their three-game series Sunday at 1 p.m. The Blue Raiders host Vanderbilt Tuesday at 7 p.m.

GAME NOTES

Sophomore Kevin Suba made his first start of the season, at designated hitter ... Jeff Beachum singled in the third. The freshman has hit safely in 20 of his last 23 games ... Chuck Akers singled in the fifth and has hit safely in 10 of his last 12 games since his batting average dropped to a season-low .192 ... Josh Archer added two more hits in the contest and has hit safely in 16 of his last 19 games since his batting average dropped to a season-low .180.

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