Jaguars Even Series With 8-6 Win

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - South Alabama scored runs in five of the first seven innings and got three hits apiece from T.J. and Josh Touchstone to defeat Middle Tennessee, 8-6, Saturday afternoon at Reese Smith Field and even the three-game series at one-all.

Middle Tennessee was down four in the ninth but got a two-out, two-run double from Nate Jaggers to bring the tying run to the plate in Josh Archer. But Archer struck out against Jaguar stopper Tony Neal for the final out.

The Jaguars (26-12, 7-4 Sun Belt) drew first blood in the contest in the second inning with a solo home run from catcher Tim Land over the centerfield wall.

Middle Tennessee (19-20, 6-8) finally solved USA starter Frank Elia in the third thanks to some wildness from the lefty and a little timely hitting.

Derek Phillips singled with one out in the inning to extend his hitting streak to nine games and Chad Cooper doubled off the base of the centerfield wall with two outs. Chuck Akers walked to load the bases before Jaggers lined a hard grounder off the chest of Jaguar second baseman Josh Touchstone.

The ball bounced into rightfield, allowing two runs to score. Jaggers hustled into second for a double, and Touchstone's throw to second got away, allowing Akers to score for a 3-1 Blue Raider lead.

South Alabama came right back in the top of the fourth, an inning that started with an error by Cooper at shortstop. After a fielder's choice and a walk, Kevin Sytko singled to center to load the bases for Brett Parker, who singled to left, plating two runs. T.J. Touchstone then singled to right to score another run before Cole Craig drove in the final run of the frame with a sacrifice fly to give the Jaguars a 5-3 advantage.

Brett Carroll got the Blue Raiders within a run with a solo shot to lead off the bottom of the inning,

clearing the scoreboard in rightcenter with a towering drive.

South Alabama got another run in the fifth with a double to rightcenter from Josh Touchstone before Adam Lind singled home the run for a 6-4 Jaguar lead. Sytko's solo homer to deep leftcenter to start the sixth chased Blue Raider starter John Williams from the contest.

The Blue Raiders threatened to cut into the lead in the sixth with a two-out single from Chris LeGuenec and a double by Jarrett England, but Phillips lined out hard to right to end the inning against Elia.

Josh Touchstone added to the lead in the seventh for the Jaguars with another solo shot, this one just to the right of centerfield for an 8-4 USA advantage.

Middle Tennessee got leadoff singles from Shane Kemp and Cooper in the seventh to chase Elia from the contest, but Akers popped up the sacrifice bunt attempt against Neal. A wild pitch put the runners on second and third with one out before Neal struck out Jaggers looking on a 2-2 fastball. Archer then struck out swinging to end the threat.

Neal walked Phillips and Cooper in the ninth but got a lineout from pinch-hitter Clif Thomas and struck out Akers before Jaggers doubled home two runs to make it a two-run game. Neal then got Archer swinging for the second time in three innings to end the contest and send the two teams into a rubber game on Sunday.

Williams (2-3) allowed seven runs, five earned, on nine hits in five-plus innings to take the loss. The junior walked two and struck out two. Jerry Knox tossed the final four innings, allowing one run on

Elia (2-0) got the victory, giving up four runs, three earned, on 10 hits in six-plus innings. The lefthander walked two and struck out two. Neal came on to get the final nine outs and pick up his third save of the year.

T.J. and Josh Touchstone both had three hits to pace South Alabama's 13-hit attack, while Sytko added a pair of hits. The bottom five batters in the Jaguar line-up scored all right runs.

Cooper went 3-for-4 with a run for the Blue Raiders, who had 10 hits in the contest but stranded seven runners in the contest, including two each in the sixth and seventh innings.

The Blue Raiders and Jaguars conclude their three-game series Sunday at 1 p.m. at Reese Smith Field. Middle Tennessee hosts Belmont and Austin Peay on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively, both at 7 p.m.

GAME NOTES

Jeff Beachum was not in the starting lineup for the first time in 28 games, dating to March 9 at Southwest Missouri State ... Chad Cooper drew the start at shortstop for the first time since suffering an injury against Florida International on April 4 ... Jarrett England was the designated hitter on Saturday, his first start of the year ... Derek Phillips extended his hitting streak to nine games with a single in the third.

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