Blue Raiders Drop 5-1 Decision

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Western Kentucky got four runs in the first four innings and starter J.C. Faircloth went six shutout innings to lead the Hilltoppers to a 5-1 victory Friday night at Nick Denes Field.

The Hilltoppers got on the board with a run in the first, as Matt Johnston walked and Antone Towns beat out an infield single with two outs before Trevor Keesling singled up the middle, plating Johnston for an early 1-0 WKU lead.

The Blue Raiders threatened in the second with back-to-back one-out singles from Chad Cooper and Derek Phillips, putting runners on the corners for Jarrett England, the senior making his second start of the year and second in the last five contests. Jarrett fouled off several pitches before striking out on a breaking ball for the second out. Shane Kemp then flied out to end the inning and the threat.

The 'Toppers got two more runs in the third. Johnston doubled down the leftfield line to leadoff and went to third on a groundout by Matt Gunning. Towns then singled through the right side, driving in the run. Towns went to second when the throw got away coming back to the infield.

Keesling then bunted and Blue Raider starter Steve Kline slipped, putting runners on the corners. Travis Brown's two-out single to left scored Towns for a 3-0 WKU advangtage.

David Lower gave the home team a 4-0 lead with a leadoff homer in the fourth. WKU threatened again when Rafael Vallejo followed Lower with a bunt single and Gunning was hit with the pitch by Kline with one out. After Towns struck out, the Blue Raiders went to the bullpen for Travis Horschel, who struck out Keesling looking to end the inning.

The Hilltoppers loaded the bases again in the fifth with a walk to Brown, a bunt single from Lower and another hit-batsman, this one to Vallejo, but Horschel got Johnston to groundout sharply to Nate Jaggers to end the threat.

Josh Archer was hit for the second time in the game and Brett Carroll drew a walk with one out in the sixth, but Cooper's bunt attempt was too hard, with WKU first baseman Gunning fielding and tagging Cooper. Phillips then grounded out to end the inning.

The Blue Raiders finally got on the board in the seventh. A pair of singles from England and Jeff Beachum preceded Jaggers' single up the middle to score a run, cutting the deficit to three. WKU reliever Matt Wilhite came in to get the final out of the inning and prevent Middle Tennessee from cutting into the lead anymore.

The 'Toppers got the run back in their half of the seventh without the aid of a hit, as Horschel walked two batters and then made an errant throw to third on a bunt attempt. After a groundout, Vallejo flied out to right, plating a run for a 5-1 WKU lead.

Kline (5-3) suffered the loss, allowing four runs, three earned, on eight hits in 3.2 innings, his shortest outing of the season. Horschel was very effective in relief, going 4.1 innings and giving up just an unearned run on two hits. Horschel walked three and struck out two.

Faircloth (6-2) got the victory, giving up no runs on just three hits in six innings. Wilhite got the final seven outs for his ninth save of the year, extending his scoreless streak to 17.1 innings.

Jarrett England had two of Middle Tennessee's six hits in the contest.

Western Kentucky had 10 hits in the contest, with two each from Towns, Keesling and Lower.

The two teams continue their three-game series Saturday at 2 p.m. and conclude the series Sunday at 1 p.m.

GAME NOTES

The Blue Raiders used their 37th different batting order in 43 games this season ... Jarrett England drew a start as the designated hitter, his second of the season and second in the last five games ... Jeff Beachum's single to left in the seventh extended his hitting streak to seven games.

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