Blue Raiders Drop Second Game at WKU

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Western Kentucky erased a four-run deficit with nine runs in the fourth and fifth innings en route to a 15-7 victory over Middle Tennesse Saturday afternoon at Nick Denes Field. The homestanding Hilltoppers claim the Sun Belt series, their second straight series win over the Blue Raiders, and look for the sweep on Sunday.

WKU reliever Andy Baldwin (3-5), a starter most of the season until the past two weeks, came on to toss 6.2 innings of four-hit relief, allowing just two runs with three strikeouts. Western Kentucky collected 13 hits in the contest in scoring a season-high in runs, and also drew four walks with two hit batsmen in the contest.

The Blue Raiders (21-23, 6-11 SBC) got on the board with three in the first inning, as Jeff Beachum drew a leadoff walk and Chuck Akers executed the hit-and-run, singling to rightcenter to put runners on the corners. Chad Cooper then hit a 2-2 pitch into rightcenter that the wind carried just over the wall for a three-run shot before WKU starter Kenny Hughes got an out in the contest.

Hughes settled down and allowed just a one-out single to right by Nate Jaggers but got out of the inning without any further damage, but the Blue Raiders held a 3-0 lead after just a half inning.

Western Kentucky (23-15, 7-6) got a run back in the bottom of the inning, as Rafael Vallejo led off with a bunt single and stole second. Trevor Keesling then hit a hard liner to center with two outs that Akers dove for. The ball got by the junior centerfielder and rolled all the way to the wall. Vallejo scored easily and Keesling tried to make it an inside-the-park homer, but the relay from Shane Kemp to Jaggers to Derek Phillips nailed the runner at the plate.

Middle Tennessee added to the lead in the third, as Cooper belted his second homer of the game to leadoff the inning. Josh Archer then singled to center and went to third on another single, this one from Jaggers. Brett Carroll then flew out to the deepest part of the park, as Vallejo made the catch

against the wall in dead centerfield, but Archer scored on the sacrifice fly to give the Blue Raiders a 5-1 advantage.

But the Hilltoppers got back in the contest with the first two batters in the bottom of the inning, as Dennis Winn singled on the first pitch and David Lower, the No. 9 hitter batting just over .200 who had two hits and a home run on Friday, blasted his second round-tripper of the weekend, also on the first pitch, over the wall in leftcenter, cutting the Blue Raider lead to 5-3.

WKU took the lead in the fourth, with Keesling leading off with a single and stealing second. A wild pitch allowed the runner to advance to third, and Matt Robinson plated the run with a single to left. Travis Brown then singled to right, with Robinson moving all the way to third, but Brown was cut down trying to advance to second on the play. Winn followed with a single through the middle to score Robinson, tying the game at five.

Winn moved to second on a wild pitch and scored when Lower's ground ball to Beachum was booted by the freshman, making a low throw to first. Lower stole second before Vallejo hit a knubber off the end of the bat that stayed fair down the first base line. Both the pitcher and catcher chased the ball, leaving no one covering the plate, and Lower scored from second on the play for a 7-5 WKU lead.

The 'Toppers took control of the game in the fifth, with five runs on just two hits and three Blue Raider errors. Keesling hit a two-run homer in the inning and Vallejo plated a run with a sacrifice fly, as Western Kentucky went ahead 12-5.

Middle Tennessee tried to cut into the lead in the sixth, as Marcus Taylor, making his first appearance since April 9, doubled with one out. Derek Phillips then singled to right to put runners on the corners. Shane Kemp followed with a ground ball to third base, where Winn threw to second for the force. Taylor broke late on the play for the plate, and when Johnston realized he could not turn the doubleplay, the second baseman fired home, where he got Taylor for an odd 5-4-2 twinkilling.

Archer blasted a two-run shot to leftfield in the seventh, cutting the Blue Raiders deficit to five. It was Archer's ninth home run in the month of April.

But Vallejo added insult to injury in the seventh for Western Kentucky, belting his first career home run over the leftfield wall for a 15-7 advantage.

Blue Raider starter John Williams (2-4) took the loss, allowing nine runs, seven earned, on 10 hits in just 4.1 innings. Williams struck out four. Danny Borne came on in relief in the fifth and got the final two outs of the frame, but not before giving up three unearned runs on just one hit while walking two.

Cooper drove in four runs, scored three times and had a pair of hits, setting a career-high for RBIs and tying a career-high in run scored. Archer and Jaggers each had two hits, while Archer scored twice.

The two teams conclude their three-game series Sunday at 1 p.m. Middle Tennessee does not play in the midweek and will host New Orleans next weekend at Reese Smith Field beginning Friday at 7 p.m.

GAME NOTES

The Blue Raiders used their 38th different lineup in 44 games this season on Saturday ... Chad Cooper's two homers in the game marked the seventh two-homer game of the season for a Blue Raider and the first of Cooper's career ... Marcus Taylor entered the game as the designated hitter in the third inning, his first appearance since leaving the Wednesday game against Memphis at home on April 9, a total of 11 games ... Troy Harp had his first at-bat since April 4 against Florida International ... Western Kentucky's run total in the game is the most allowed this season by Blue Raider pitching ... Jeff Beachum's seven-game hitting streak ended with an 0-for-4 effort.

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