Blue Raiders Salvage Split

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Josh Archer collected a career-high five hits and also scored three times and drove in three runs, as Middle Tennessee defeated Arkansas-Little Rock, 16-12, in the second of two games Sunday afternoon at Curran Conway Park. The homestanding Trojans scored three times in the bottom of the ninth to win the first game, 6-5, a contest finished after it was suspended Friday night because of rain.

Archer had five consecutive hits to start the second game for the Blue Raiders, while Chad Cooper added three hits and scored four times. The Blue Raiders secured the No. 6 seed in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament that begins Wednesday in Lafayette, La.

The Blue Raiders got four runs in the top of the first on three hits and two walks. Jeff Beachum drew a leadoff walk and Chuck Akers bunted his way on before Cooper's walk loaded the bases. Archer unloaded the bags with a double down the leftfield line. Archer later scored on a double to right by Nate Jaggers.

But Middle Tennessee had trouble holding the lead, allowing the home team to plate six runs in their half of the first on just three hits. Blue Raider starter BJ Church allowed a leadoff single to Aaron Haefele that turned into a three-base hit when Chris LeGuenec misplayed the ball in leftfield.

Church walked the next two batters, loading the bases, but struck out the next two batters. A walk forced in a run before a single to left by Brodie Ward drove in a pair. Josh Ward's nine-iron made it just over the wall in rightfield for a three-run shot and a 6-4 Trojan lead.

But the Blue Raiders responded with four more runs in the second, as LeGuenec led off with a double and Beachum followed with a single up the middle. LeGuenec scored on a balk and Beachum plated on Akers single to right.

Cooper bunted his way on before Archer's single to left loaded the bases. Brett Carroll's single scored Akers and Cooper came across on a ground ball to third by Jaggers, giving Middle Tennessee an 8-6 edge.

Jerry Knox entered to pitch for the Blue Raiders and got three outs on just 12 pitches after the first inning-and-a-half took more than an hour. UALR got a solo homer from Charlie Anderson in the third to cut the lead to one.

Middle Tennessee added to the lead in the fourth, scoring three times. Archer doubled just inside the rightfield line and Carroll followed with a walk. Jaggers drove in another run with his second double of the game. Carroll scored on a ground ball and Jaggers later came across on a sacrifice fly to right by Marcus Taylor.

The Blue Raiders added two more runs in the fifth when Archer reached on an infield single to leadoff and Knox drew a two-out walk. Both runners scored on Troy Harp's double to rightcenter for a 13-7 advantage.

Haefele blasted a solo shot to leadoff the seventh, and Santino Dewreede followed with a walk and Daniel Moseley was hit. After a wild pitch, Leo Monterrey lined to right, where Taylor dropped the ball, allowing one run to score and putting runners on second and third with none out and the Blue Raiders holding a 13-9 advantage.

Middle Tennessee brought in Chris Mobley, who gave up a rope off the base of the centerfield wall, driving home two runs and cutting the Blue Raider lead to 13-11, still with no one out. A strikeout and a doubleplay got the Blue Raiders out of the inning without further damage.

Cooper singled and eventually scored on a walk to Harp, his fourth of the game, forcing in a run in the eighth for a 14-11 Blue Raider lead.

Matt Spatafora blooped a single to leadoff the bottom of the eighth for UALR. After a walk and a fielder's choice, Daniel Moseley drove in the run with a single, cutting the Blue Raider lead back to two.

Akers was hit and scored on Cooper's single in the ninth, and Cooper later scored on a wild pitch for a 16-12 Blue Raider lead.

Knox (4-2) worked three innings to get the victory, allowing just one hit and striking out one. Mobley got his second save of the year, giving up one run on four hits in three innings with three strikeouts.

Trojan starter Scott Sharpe (5-4) worked one-plus innings and gave up eight runs on nine hits with two walks to take the loss.

Jaggers had three RBIs in the victory to go along with Archer's three, while Akers scored three times and Beachum crossed the plate twice. Harp walked four times in the game and drove in three runs, catching 15 of the 16 innings played on Sunday.

In game one, the Blue Raiders scored three times in the top of the ninth to take a two-run lead but

could not hold it, as ace reliever Chase Swing blew his second save of the year in allowing three runs in the bottom of the ninth to give Arkansas-Little Rock a 6-5 victory in the conclusion of a suspended game from Friday night.

Middle Tennessee trailed 3-2 heading into the ninth before rallying for three runs to take the lead. Jaggers singled to right to start the inning and pinch-hitter Kevin Suba moved the runner with a sacrifice bunt. After a strikeout, Taylor ripped a single to right, but it was too hard to score the run.

Taylor moved to second on a wild pitch before Beachum lifted a single to leftcenter, scoring both runners and giving Middle Tennessee a 4-3 edge. Akers then doubled, plating Beachum and giving the visitors a two-run lead heading into the final half-inning.

The Trojans would not die, as Spatafora and Haefele both singled to start the ninth against Swing. Dewreede bunted but Carroll got the force out at second, putting runners on the corners with one out.

Rick Guarno walked to load the bases and one run scored on a wild pitch. Joe Mercer's slow-roller scored Dewreede with the tying run. Chris Julo then singled through the left side, scoring Guarno with the winning run.

Middle Tennessee took a 2-0 lead in the game, getting one run in the first and third before Little Rock took the lead with three runs in the sixth.

Cooper and Archer had back-to-back doubles in the first on Friday night to give the Blue Raiders an early lead. The pair again had consecutive two-baggers with two outs in the third, scoring Cooper for a 2-0 Middle Tennessee lead.

Blue Raider starter Steve Kline worked one inning on Friday and came back to throw four more scoreless frames on Sunday, allowing four hits with one walk and two strikeouts.

But Middle Tennessee reliever John Williams could not hold the lead, giving up three runs in just one-third on an inning.

Dewreede singled and Guarno followed with a double before Mercer walked to load the bases. A walk to Julo forced in a run and J.J. Yant's sacrifice fly plated Guarno to tie the game. A double down the rightfield line from Brodie Ward scored Mercer, giving the Trojans a 3-2 lead before all of the excitement in the ninth.

Swing (2-4) took the loss, allowing three runs on three hits and blowing just his second save of the year. It also spoiled an excellent effort by Travis Horschel, who worked 2.2 hitless innings with a walk and a strikeout and was in line for the win before UALR rallied.

Travis Trammell (3-2), the last of four Trojan pitchers, got the win despite allowing a run on two hits in one-third of an inning.

Beachum, Cooper and Archer all had two hits, while Beachum and Archer both drove in a pair of runs. Cooper also scored twice for the Blue Raiders in the loss.

Middle Tennessee now heads to the Sun Belt Conference Tournament in Lafayette, La., beginning Wednesday. The Blue Raiders will take on host Louisiana-Lafayette in first-round action at M.L. 'Tigue' Moore Field on the Louisiana-Lafayette campus at 6:30 p.m.

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