Blue Raiders Fall, 10-4

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STARKVILLE, Miss. - Mississippi State scored four runs in the first and five more in the fifth and Paul Maholm tossed 6.2 strong innings, as the 16th-ranked and top-seeded Bulldogs defeated Middle Tennessee, 10-4, Friday night at Dudy Noble Field in a first-round game of the Starkville Regional in NCAA baseball tournament action.

The Blue Raiders committed four errors in the game after committing four in four games last week at the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. The Bulldogs took full advantage of the opportunities and never looked back.

The Bulldogs sent eight batters to the plate in the first, pushing four runs across on six hits.

Matthew Maniscalco led off the contest with a single past Nate Jaggers at second base and scored on a double to left-center by Steve Gendron. Matthew Brinson then doubled over the head of Chad Cooper in left, plating the second run of the inning.

Brad Corley singled to right to put runners on the corners. Brinson scored on Craig Tatum's fielder's choice, and Thomas Berkery gave the home team and 4-0 lead with a two-out RBI single to left.

MSU added a run in the second without the aid of a hit, as Gendron reached with two outs on an error by Jeff Beachum at shortstop. Brinson then drew a walk and the throw back to the pitcher was wild, sailing all the way into centerfield. Gendron never stopped and beat the relay to the plate for a 5-0 Bulldog advantage.

The Blue Raiders got on the board in the fifth when Troy Harp blooped in a single to leadoff and Chuck Akers drew a two-out walk. Berkery's throw to first on a ground ball to Cooper was wild and went in the dugout, allowing Harp to score from second. Middle Tennessee had a chance to cut into the lead more, but Josh Archer grounded out to end the inning.

Mississippi State put the game out of reach with five runs on six hits in the bottom of the frame.

Corley, Tatum and Robby Goodson all singled to start the inning, and Goodson's rocket to center was booted by Chuck Akers, allowing Corley to score. Joseph Hunter plated a run with a sacrifice fly

to center before Jon Mungle's infield single off the glove of a diving Archer plated Goodson.

Maniscalco followed with a single to right and the final two runs of the frame crossed on Gendron's second double of the contest, giving the Bulldogs a 10-1 lead.

The Blue Raiders cut into the lead in the seventh against MSU starter Paul Maholm, as Harp walked and Shane Kemp doubled to rightcenter to leadoff. After a popout, Akers grounded out to first base. Harp did not break for the plate, but Kemp went almost all the way to third.

MSU first baseman Brinson ran at Kemp and then fired to second, where Kemp slid in under the tag. Harp scored on the play, and Cooper followed with an RBI single to left. Archer then blasted a double off the 20-foot wall in centerfield, plating Cooper and cutting the deficit to 10-4.

Maholm (9-2) struck out six and walked two while allowing four runs, three earned, on seven hits to get the victory. Saunders Ramsey got the final seven outs, striking two and not giving up a hit.

Blue Raider starter Steve Kline (7-4) took the loss, giving up eight hits and five runs, four earned, in two-plus innings, his shortest stint of the year. He walked two and struck out two.

Harp scored twice while Jaggers collected two of Middle Tennessee's seven hits.

The Blue Raiders take on Missouri at 11 a.m. Saturday in an elimination game. The winner would play again at 7 p.m. Saturday in another elimination contest.

GAME NOTES

The Blue Raiders used the same lineup for the fourth straight game after using 48 lineups in the first 54 games ... Steve Kline lasted just two-plus innings to start the game, his shortest outing of the season and the shortest of his career as a starter. He allowed five runs, four earned, the most allowed since April 4 against Florida International. Kline's shortest outing this season was also against FIU the first weekend of April. The shortest of his career had previously been versus Cumberland University on April 25, 2001 ...Shay Horseman entered the game in the fifth, his first appearance since May 13 at Vanderbilt and his first relief outing since March 30 at Louisiana-Lafayette. Horseman worked 3.1 innings in relief, his longest relief outing since February 23 against Jacksonville State, the third game of the season ... The Blue Raiders made four errors combined in the four games last week at the Sun Belt Conference Tournament. They made four in tonight's game.

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