Blue Raiders Lose Twice at Easton Tiger Classic

McLure shines in Blue Raider debut

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BATON ROUGE, La. - Middle Tennessee softball (0-2) dropped both games in the first day of action at the Easton Tiger Classic on Friday. The Blue Raiders fell to host No. 9 LSU 6-2 (2-0) and Missouri (2-0) 8-3.

Freshman Caitlin McLure had a glowing debut in a Blue Raider uniform. The Anaheim, Calif. native had two hits, scored two of Middle Tennessee's five total runs, and had two stolen bases against LSU and Missouri.

Middle Tennessee had its chances against No. 9 LSU but the Tigers took advantage of key Blue Raider errors and rode the long ball to the win the game.

McLure's first start as a Blue Raider was a lesson in patience, and it paid off, as she drew a walk to begin the game. After a failed bunt attempt by Martha Davis, McLure took matters into her own hands stealing the first base of 2007. After Shelby Stiner struck out looking for the second out, senior Muriel Ledbetter did what she does best - picked up a clutch hit. Ledbetter hit a double to left field to score McLure. Middle Tennessee had runners on first and second, thanks to a walk by Melissa Weiland, and looked to be threatening another run, but Whitney Darlington struck out to end the inning.

Things looked to be going Middle Tennessee's way as Blue Raider pitcher Sam Floyd got two quick ground outs in the bottom of the first, but LSU capitalized on key mistakes. Floyd walked Leslie Klein who advanced to second on a wild pitch. A second walk to Quinlan Duhon put runners on first and second and Vanessa Soto came to the plate. Soto hit a three-run homerun over the right centerfield wall to give the Tigers a 3-1 lead.

The Blue Raiders had their chances in the top of the third inning as McLure got on base for the second time in the game thanks to a Tiger error. With one out, Stiner drew a walk and after Ledbetter ground out to first, McLure and Stiner moved to second and third. Middle Tennessee's

scoring hopes ended when Weiland struck out looking.

The fourth inning was another missed opportunity for Middle Tennessee. With one out, Floyd reached first off the second LSU error of the game. Katie Mielke's single to left field placed runners on first and second. A ground out by Ashley Cline and a pop up by McLure ended Middle Tennessee's threat.

LSU padded its lead in the bottom of the fourth inning thanks to a solo homerun by Duhon. Soto added the fifth Tiger run of the game off an RBI single, which scored Rachel Mitchell. The Tigers notched their sixth run of the game thanks to a Blue Raider error.

Middle Tennessee proved it may be down but wouldn't go quietly in the seventh inning. Mielke led off with her first double of the season and the second double of the game for the Blue Raiders. McLure picked up her first hit in a Middle Tennessee uniform, with one out, to advance Mielke to third and then moved to second with her second stolen base of the game. An error by LSU allowed Davis to reach first, scoring Mielke but McLure was gunned down at home.

Floyd tossed three innings, to take the loss, allowing four runs off two hits and two walks. Freshman lefty Lindsey Vander Lugt replaced Floyd in the fourth inning. Vander Lugt tossed three innings of relief allowing two runs off five hits and struck out two.

Mielke led the Blue Raiders going 2-for-3 with a double. Ledbetter and McLure were the only other Middle Tennessee players to record a hit against the Tigers.

Missouri took the early lead in Middle Tennessee's second game of the night and kept pounding away the rest of the game. Leanne Bowers opened the game with a single off Blue Raider hurler Vander Lugt. Bowers advanced to second off a ground out and moved to third thanks to a Middle Tennessee error. A wild pitch by Vander Lugt scored Bowers to give the Tigers the early 1-0 lead.

In the top of the second inning Missouri tacked on its second run of the game. Kathy Masterson led off the inning with a single and with one out she was out on a fielder's choice that put A.J. White on first. White stole second and advanced to third on passed ball and scored thanks to an RBI single by Sarah Stringer.

Weiland led off the bottom of the second with a single up the middle. An error by Missouri allowed Mielke to reach first but Weiland was thrown out as she tried to reach third base for the first out of the inning. A double by junior Kristine Reed moved Mielke to third but a failed bunt attempt by Justine Cerda accounted for the second out of the inning. Darlington struck out looking to end the Blue Raider threat.

Missouri broke the game open in the top of the third inning. A pair of singles and a Blue Raider fielding error loaded the bases for the Tigers. An RBI single by Miceala Minner scored the third run of the game, and then Missouri notched the fourth run off a wild pitch by Vander Lugt. Blue Raider pitcher Amy Candioto saw her first action when she replaced Vander Lugt with two runners on base and no outs. She got a strikeout before giving up a two RBI double to Masterson. Middle Tennessee picked up the second out of the inning when Masterson was caught stealing at third. A ground out by Stringer ended a four-run third for the Tigers.

Middle Tennessee got on the board in the bottom of the third inning. McLure started off by drawing a

walk and advanced to second thanks to a sacrifice bunt by Davis. With a 1-2 count, Stiner hit an RBI double down the left field line to plate McLure. Ledbetter ground into a double play to end the inning.

Missouri plated its seventh run of the game in the top of the fourth inning. Minner hit an RBI single to score Andee Allen.

Middle Tennessee had a scoring opportunity in the fifth inning. Freshman Jessica Ives led off the inning with a walk. Back-to-back strikeouts from Justine Cerda and McLure accounted for the first two outs of the inning. Davis notched her first hit of 2007 with a double that moved Ives to third but Stiner ground out to second to end the inning.

With the bases loaded, Missouri's Amanda Renth hit a sacrifice fly to score the Tiger's eighth run of the game in the sixth inning.

Ledbetter got the distinction of being the first Blue Raider to hit a homerun in 2007 as she launched a rocket to left center to start the bottom of the sixth inning. It was the 14th homerun of her career, as Ledbetter is chasing the career homerun record, which is 23.

Reed got something going in the bottom of the sixth when she drew a two out walk. Ives singled to centerfield and advanced Reed to third. Cerda's RBI single scored Reed for the Blue Raider's third run of the game and McLure struck out looking to end the threat.

Vander Lugt took the loss against Missouri tossing three innings and allowing three earned runs on six hits and recorded one strikeout. Candioto came in for four innings of relief allowing two runs on four hits and also struck out one.

Middle Tennessee's hopes of playing on Sunday at the Easton Tiger Classic now hinges on its success Saturday, as the club faces Centenary and Memphis. Centenary is also 0-2 after the first day and Memphis is 1-1. The Blue Raiders need to defeat at least one of these clubs to have any hope of earning one of the four seeds for Sunday's round of action. Middle Tennessee will face Centenary at 9 a.m. and Memphis at 6 p.m.

NOTES: Freshman Caitlin McLure stole the first base of 2007 in the opening game against LSU and ended the game with two ... In the first two games of the season McLure had two hits, scored two runs and had two stolen bases ... Fellow freshman Lindsey Vander Lugt saw the first action of her Blue Raider career in relief, stepping on the mound in the fourth inning against the Tigers and got her first start against Missouri ... Vander Lugt was the first Blue Raider pitcher to record a strikeout in 2007 logging two against the Tigers ... Muriel Ledbetter started her senior campaign with a bang, hitting an RBI double against LSU to give Middle Tennessee an early 1-0 lead and then hitting a homerun against Missouri ... Freshman Jessica Ives got her first hit as a Blue Raider when she picked up a single against Missouri ... The Blue Raiders had five doubles in two games with Martha Davis, Shelby Stiner, Kristine Reed, Muriel Ledbetter and Katie Mielke each notching double baggers ... Middle Tennessee opens 0-2 for the third straight season.

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