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Blue Raiders Drop Pair of Games to JSU Middle Tennessee swept in Sunday doubleheader

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Redshirt freshman Myles Ervin collected three hits in the opener and one in the second game of Sunday's doubleheader against Jacksonville State. (MT)

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Jacksonville State scored an unearned run in the eighth inning en route to a 7-6 victory in the first game and got five shutout innings from Ben Tootle in a 3-0 win in the second game for a doubleheader sweep of Middle Tennessee Sunday at Reese Smith Field.

The victories for the visiting Gamecocks (2-1) ended a five-game winning streak in the series for Middle Tennessee. The Blue Raiders (1-2) have lost four of the last five series against Jacksonville State.

In game one, the Blue Raiders erased a five-run deficit early in the game only to allow an unearned run in the eighth in a 7-6 loss.

Adam Warren homered twice in the game for the Blue Raiders, including a two-run homer to get Middle Tennessee on the board in the fourth and a solo shot in the seventh to tie the game at six.

The Gamecocks took advantage of a crucial mistake to score the game-winning run in the eighth inning. Leadoff hitter Bret Smith was hit with a 2-2 pitch with two outs in the inning and promptly stole second. Nick Cleckler then grounded to Matt Ray at shortstop. Ray bobbled the ball and then made a wild throw to first, allowing Smith to score all the way from second on the play.

Tyler Copeland worked three-plus innings in the start for the Blue Raiders, allowing five runs on seven hits, walking one and striking out one. **Brett Reilley** did his job in middle relief, giving up an unearned run on one hit in four innings of work.

JSU starter Tony Drinkard allowed two runs on six hits in 4.1 innings, walking two and striking out two. Josh Miller (1-0) got three outs in the eighth to pick up the win before Jon Clements struck out a pair in the ninth to record the save. Middle Tennessee's Tyler Hyde (0-1) suffered the tough-luck loss, giving up an unearned run in two-thirds of an inning of work.

Myles Ervin and Zach Barrett both had three hits for the Blue Raiders, while Warren was 2-for-4 with two home runs and three RBIs.

The Gamecocks scored twice in the second inning on three hits. Clay Whittemore led off the inning with a single and Jake Ball followed with another single. After a sacrifice bunt from Daniel Adamson, Andrew Edge doubled down into leftfield, plating both runners for a 2-0 JSU lead.

JSU's Garrett Bass doubled to leftcenter with one out in the third and scored on a two-out single to left from Whittemore.

In the fourth Adamson singled to leadoff and Edge followed with a double off the base of the centerfield wall, scoring Adamson and chasing Copeland from the contest. After a wild pitch, Edge scored on an infield single by Smith.

In the bottom of the inning **Wayne Kendrick** reached on an infield single before Warren hammered the first pitch over the wall in leftfield, cutting the Gamecocks lead to 5-2.

Doug Birkofer walked on four pitches and Kendrick reached on a swinging bunt, both with one out in the fifth. JSU went to the bullpen for Alex Jones, who got the Gamecocks out of the jam after Warren sacrificed Kendrick to second and **Dillon Heath** flied out to deep rightcenter.

JSU extended the lead back to four, pushing across a run in the sixth without the benefit of a hit. Smith walked on four pitches with one out, stole second, moved to third on a throwing error and scored on a sacrifice fly from Bass for a 6-2 Jacksonville State advantage.

But the Blue Raiders answered with three runs in the bottom of the sixth on two hits. **Rawle Rawley Bishop** walked to leadoff, Ervin followed with a single and Barrett's single through the middle made it to the outfield and plated Bishop. **Alex Watson** walked to load the bases and JSU went to the bullpen again, this time for Brian Booth.

Ray's fielder's choice scored the second run of the inning and **Doug Birkofer's** well-executed squeeze bunt scored Barrett, cutting the JSU lead to 6-5.

Warren tied the contest in the bottom of the seventh with a solo shot to leadoff the inning. Bishop walked later in the inning and Barrett singled up the middle with two outs, putting runners on the corners, but Watson flied out against Miller on the first pitch to end the threat. In game two, Tootle (1-0) scattered four hits over five scoreless innings and Brian Piazza's two-run double in the second was all the Gamecocks would need in a 3-0 victory.

The Gamecocks scored twice in the second on two hits to take an early lead and could have had more. Whittemore singled with one out and Allen Rose followed with a walk. Brian Piazza's double to leftcenter plated both runners. With two outs Josh Sanders and Smith both walked to load the bases, but Cleckler struck out looking to end the threat.

In the third Piazza singled to leadoff, moved to second on a groundout and scored on a two-out single from Smith for a 3-0 JSU advantage.

Middle Tennessee starter **Nick Marrs** (0-1) allowed three runs on five hits in four innings. **Josh Anderson** worked two scoreless innings and **Brett Smalley** tossed a scoreless frame in the seventh.

The Blue Raiders managed just five hits in the nightcap after collecting 10 hits in the opener.

JSU's Clark Jinks tossed two scoreless innings to pick up the save, giving up one hit and striking out three.

Middle Tennessee takes on Samford in Birmingham on Tuesday and Wednesday this week. Tuesday's game starts at 3 p.m. and Wednesday's at 1 p.m.

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