

Box, Ray Lead Offense in 18-6 Triumph

Raiders play New Orleans for third time in three days on Saturday; Game shown live on CSS

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MOBILE, Ala. - Grant Box and Matt Ray both collected a career-high four hits, Ray scored four times, Rawley Bishop drove in five runs and Myles Ervin added four RBIs, as Middle Tennessee stayed alive with an 18-6 triumph over New Orleans in the Sun Belt Championships at Stanky Field. The Blue Raiders (32-27) ended a four-game losing streak this season against the Privateers (35-24), pounding out 20 hits in the victory. Middle Tennessee won its second elimination contest of



the day after taking care of Florida Atlantic, 7-4, earlier in the day. Middle Tennessee must beat UNO again at 11 a.m. on Saturday to reach the tournament championship game for the fifth straight year and sixth time in seven tries since joining the Sun Belt. The Blue Raiders fell behind, 3-1, after one inning, but scored once in the second, four times in the third and four more runs in the fifth to take the lead for good. The team added three runs in the eighth and five more in the ninth, upping its record to 16-5 in the last five SBC Tournaments. Middle Tennessee starter Tyler Copeland (5-2) got off to a rocky start but settled down, giving up three runs on six hits in five-plus innings. He exited the game with two runners on base that later scored, but the lefthander kept his club in the contest long enough to let the offense get rolling. Chad Coley tossed one-plus inning of relief and Shay Horseman worked the final three innings for his first save, giving up only a solo homer in the ninth. "It was a very good win for us in a very big situation," head coach Steve Peterson said. "New Orleans had beaten us four straight, so I'm sure the law of averages caught up to them. I know my team really wanted to get after them and get a win. There was a little motivation there because of the results this season." UNO starter Stephen Whalen (7-5) suffered the loss, giving up six runs on six hits in three innings. Whalen was the first of four Privateers hurlers. Ray had scuffled in the first four games of the tournament before exploding in the contest, collecting four singles and two stolen bases and scoring twice. Box added a pair of RBIs and scored twice as well. Bishop was 3-for-5 with five RBIs and three runs scored, while Ervin hit a three-run homer, scored twice and had RBIs in all. "It's unfortunate that we got into the situation where you lose and go home," Box said. "We wanted to prove something against New Orleans and we need to come out and do that again [Saturday]. We just want to take one game at a time and not do too much. We were patient and got our pitches

because we knew Copeland was giving us a good outing on the mound." The Blue Raiders took an early lead with a run in the first. Ray singled on the left side, stole second, moved to third on Kendrick's fly ball to center and scored a groundout from Adam Warren. But the Privateers scored three times in the bottom of the inning to take the lead. Brandon Bowser singled to leadoff and scored on a two-out double to rightcenter from Johnny Giovatella. Josh Tarnow then singled home Giovatella and Drew Anderson followed with a double off the left centerfield wall, plating Tarnow for a 3-1 UNO advantage. Middle Tennessee cut into the deficit with a run in the second. Zach Barrett drew a one-out walk and Box followed with a single. Both runners moved up on a wild pitch and Barrett scored when Whalen was called for a balk. The Blue Raiders took the lead in four runs in the third on four hits. Ray put down a beautiful bunt to leadoff, Kendrick followed with a walk and Warren was hit, loading the bases. Bishop then laced a single into leftcenter, scoring two runs. After a popout and a lineout, Box dumped a single into short left, scoring Warren. A wild pitch moved the runners to second and third and a slow roller down the third base line by Ervin plated Bishop for a 6-3 advantage. Middle Tennessee added four more runs in the fifth on four more hits. Bishop led off with a single and Barrett blooped a single into short right with one out. Box singled off the glove of a diving David Broussard at shortstop. The ball ricocheted into short leftfield, allowing Bishop to score. Ervin then belted his sixth homer of the year, a three-run shot, over both fences in leftfield for a 10-3 lead. The Privateers scored twice in the sixth, with the rally starting after Greg Wolfe was hit and Mark McGonigle walked. That ended the day for Copeland. Coley struck out Broussard before allowing a two-run double to Bowser. But the lefthander got out of the inning without any further damage. UNO threatened again in the seventh after a leadoff walk to Giovatella and an error by Barrett, but Horseman induced a 5-4-3 doubleplay from Anderson and a popout by pinch-hitter Greg Comarda to end the inning. The Blue Raiders added to the lead with three more runs in the eighth on four hits. Ray singled and Kendrick followed with a double down the leftfield line, his 22nd of the year. Bishop then singled sharply to right, scoring two runs, and Blake McDade followed with an RBI double to leftcenter for a 13-5 advantage. In the ninth Box led off with a single and Ervin reached on a Giovatella error. Robertson walked to load the bases and Ray followed with an RBI single to right. Kendrick then laced a triple just inside the rightfield line, clearing the bases, and pinch-runner Taylor Dennis scored two batters later on a sacrifice fly from Bishop. UNO pinch-hitter Ryan Edens scored the game's final run with a leadoff homer in the ninth, his second of the season. **GAME NOTES** Wayne Kendrick collected a pair of hits in the contest, moving him into a tie with Jeff Beachum on the single-season hits list with 98. Kendrick also collected his 22nd double of the year, moving all alone into third place on the single-season charts. He scored two runs in the game as well, giving him 61 for the season, tying for seventh on the single-season charts with Eric McNamee (2005), Justin Sims (2001) and Justin Links (2000, 2001) ... Rawley Bishop recorded five RBIs in the contest, giving the sophomore 65 for the season. Bishop ranks sixth on the single-season list ... Kendrick's triple in the ninth inning gave him seven career three-baggers, tying for 10th on the career charts with Jason Maxwell (1991-93), Danny Moore (1976-77) and Steve Zitney (1973-76) ... Middle Tennessee moved to 16-5 in the Sun Belt Championships over the last five years, including at least three victories in all five tournaments.

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