Taylor Leads Home Run Attack for Blue Raiders

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee's Marcus Taylor blasted a pair of home runs and a double, driving in six runs and scoring four more, as the Blue Raiders defeated IP-Fort Wayne, 24-2, in the season opener for both teams Friday afternoon in front of 1,520 at Reese Smith Field. Taylor also walked three times in the win, scoring in the first, second, third and sixth innings before leaving for pinch runner Robert Toline after Taylor's third walk of the contest in the seventh. Middle Tennessee scored four times in the first and third, five runs in the second and eight more in the sixth in scoring the most runs since also plating 24 against Western Kentucky on April, 23, 1992, at Reese Smith Field. The last time the Blue Raiders scored 20 runs in a game came three seasons ago in a 21-14 slugfest at Lipscomb in March of 2001. Blue Raider starter Chris Mobley (1-0) allowed an unearned run in the first before holding the Mastodons to two hits over the next four innings. The junior righthander, making just his ninth career start and seventh in his last 11 outings dating to last season, gave up four hits in all and one earned run, striking out seven and walking two in five innings of work. A pair of relievers pitched two innings each to finish the contest for Middle Tennessee. Junior college transfer Eric Blevins entered in the sixth and promptly loaded the bases on two singles and a walk, but worked his way out of the jam with a pair of strikeouts and a

groundout. Sophomore Jeff Kasser got the final six outs, striking out a pair and inducing IPFW's Tyler Fowler to bounce into the second doubleplay of the game turned by Middle Tennessee. IPFW used four hurlers in the contest, with starter Adam Ferris (0-1) taking the loss after allowing eight runs, five earned, on three hits in 1.2 innings. Middle Tennessee had 16 hits in the contest and was aided by five Mastodons errors as well as 11 walks and five hit batsmen. The Blue Raiders wasted little time in starting the fireworks after IPFW got a run in the top of the first. Junior college transfer Eric McNamee walked with one out, one of six times he would reach in the contest, before Brett Carroll reached on an error. Josh Archer was hit by the pitch to load the bases before Taylor's two-run double. Another run would score in the inning on an error and the final score of the first came across on a balk. In the second Chuck Akers got just enough of a ball to get it over the rightfield fence for a two-run blast, just the fourth of his career. Akers was aided by Friday's hard-driving wind in that direction. Taylor belted a two-run shot of his own four batters later, and the ninth run of the contest crossed when Troy Harp was hit for the second time in the inning, forcing in Shane Kemp. A McNamee single and walks to Carroll and Taylor preceded Kemp's grand slam just over the wall in front of the scoreboard in rightcenter in the third, giving Middle Tennessee a 13-1 edge. IPFW tallied its final score in the fifth, thanks to a single and stolen base by Zach Walton and a two-out double to leftcenter from leadoff hitter Ryan Keena. The Blue Raiders put the game out of reach with eight runs in the sixth, sending 12 batters to the plate and collecting six hits. A McNamee free pass preceded a line drive blast just inside the leftfield foul pole from Carroll. Archer then doubled before Taylor's towering blast onto the football practice fields beyond the rightfield wall, his second round-tripper of the game. A Jeff Beachum double and Chase Eakes walk set the tables for senior catcher Harp, who belted a three-run shot over the wall in leftcenter for a 20-2 advantage. McNamee then tripled home Akers for the final run of the frame. Toline doubled home the final two runs of the contest, slicing a two-bagger just inside the leftfield line to plate Carroll and McNamee in the eighth. Carroll and Taylor both scored four times, with Kemp and Harp each driving in four runs. The two teams play again Saturday at 2 p.m. at Reese Smith Field, with the series concluding Sunday at 1 p.m. **GAME NOTES**

Middle Tennessee's 24 runs were the most since also plating 24 against Western Kentucky on April, 23, 1992, at Reese Smith Field. The last time the Blue Raiders scored 20 runs in a game came three seasons ago in a 21-14 slugfest at Lipscomb in March of 2001 ... Junior Chris Mobley made his ninth career start and seventh in his last 11 outings dating to last season ... The meeting was the first-ever between the two schools ... Sophomore Marcus Taylor had never driven in more than two runs in a contest before plating six runners in the game. Taylor also tied his career-high with three hits and set new highs in runs scored, home runs and walks ... Junior college transfer Eric McNamee tied the school single-game record with five runs scored, last accomplished by Nate Jaggers versus Lipscomb in 2002 ... A total of seven Blue Raiders made their first career appearance, including starter McNamee and pitcher Eric Blevins, as well as reserves Adam Warren, Robert Toline, Luke Parham, Wayne Kendrick and Tommy Decker.

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