Blue Raiders Fall, 5-3, in Rubber Game

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JACKSONVILLE, Ala. - Jacksonville State scored twice in the second and the sixth and got an insurance run in the eighth, preserving a 5-3 victory over Middle Tennessee and a series victory Sunday at Rudy Abbott Field. The Gamecocks got clutch hitting from the bottom of their order, including four of the team's eight hits from the eight and nine spots in the order. Middle Tennessee stranded seven runners in the game and 28 in the three-game series. The Blue Raiders got on the board first again with a single run in the first. Eric McNamee walked to leadoff and scored on a two-out single to left by Josh Archer. JSU took the lead in the second after Robby Goodson led off with a double to leftcenter. One batter later Winston Pearson belted a fastball into the jet stream that was blowing out to left, clearing the wall for a two-run homer and a 2-1 Gamecock lead. After the first, JSU starter C.R. Palmer settled down, limiting the Blue Raiders to just two hits and three baserunners over the next five innings. Chuck Akers singled in the second and Archer collected his second hit of the contest in the fourth. The only other runner was a leadoff walk to Brett Carroll in the sixth, who was stranded at second after moving over on a sacrifice bunt. The Gamecocks busted the game open in their half of the sixth thanks to a walk, a throwing error and a hit batsman. JSU's Scott Smith walked on four pitches to leadoff, chasing Blue Raider starter Steve Kline. Reliever Eric Blevins induced a ground ball from Pearson, but Carroll's throw to second to start the double play was high, pulling McNamee off the bag. JSU's Matt Ruckdeschel then squared to bunt to move both runners over, but was hit, loading the bases. After a short fly ball for the first out, Bret Pettus singled to right, driving home a pair of runs for a 4-1 Gamecock advantage. Blevins worked out of the jam with a strikeout and a lineout, but not before the home team had taken a three-run lead and turned the game over to its bullpen. But the Blue Raiders jumped on JSU reliever Josh Forrest quickly, with Shane Kemp leading off with a single before pinch-hitter Derek Phillips hit one opposite field that just cleared the wall for a two-run homer, cutting the deficit to 4-3. The Gamecocks added an insurance run in the eighth, with Jack Ball singling with out one, moving to second on a groundout and scoring on Jason Horn's bloop single down the rightfield line, giving JSU a 5-3 lead heading to the ninth. Middle Tennessee was overpowered by JSU closer Robby Goodson, who struck out the side in the eighth

and another in the ninth, to pick up his second save of the series with two scoreless innings. Kline (1-1) took the loss, allowing three runs, two earned, on five hits with five strikeouts. Palmer (1-1) got the victory, working six innings and giving up one run on four hits with six strikeouts. Blue Raider head coach Steve Peterson said his team must improve in several areas in order to win consistently. "Offensively we're striking out too much. We're a very easy team to pitch to right now," Peterson said. "We saw two different styles of righthanders. [Palmer] changed speeds and mixed his fastball, and [Goodson] came in and challenged the middle of our order in the eighth and just whipped 'em. "Defensively we had some breakdowns. We got the groundball and didn't execute the doubleplay [in the sixth], and Blevins just made a bad pitch to [Pettus]. "Jacksonville made the plays today and pitched better than we did. The better-playing ballclub won today." Archer and Kemp each went 2-for-4 in the loss, while McNamee failed to get a hit, breaking his five-game hitting streak. The Blue Raiders struck out 10 times in the contest and 31 times in the series. The Blue Raiders continue their current eight-game road trip next weekend with a three-game series at Southeastern Louisiana in Hammond, La. Middle Tennessee returns home with a three-game series versus 2003 College World Series participant Southwest Missouri State, March 12-14, at Reese Smith Field.

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