Blue Raider Bats Pound SLU for Sweep, 14-8

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HAMMOND, La. - On a day when the pitching staff struggled a bit, the Middle Tennessee offense covered for its brethren, pounding out 16 hits en route to a 14-8 victory and series sweep of Southeastern Louisiana Sunday at Alumni Field.

The Blue Raiders broke a 2-2 tie with three runs in the fifth and added four-run innings in the seventh and ninth to post the first nonconference road sweep since March 18-20, 1995, at UAB, and the first series road sweep of any sort since April 13-15, 2001, at Arkansas-Little Rock.

Five players in the lineup had multiple hits, including the top three in the order - Eric McNamee, Jeff Beachum and Shane Kemp - all collecting three hits apiece. Brett Carroll and Chase Eakes both had a pair of hits, while McNamee and Beachum each scored three times and Kemp drove in four runs.

Blue Raider starter Steve Kline worked just 3.2 innings, allowing two runs on four hits but working out of a tough jam in the third. He gave way to Danny Borne (1-0), who worked 2.1 hitless innings to get the victory, striking out two.

The staff did surrender runs in the seventh and ninth and SLU had the tying run on deck in the eighth, forcing Blue Raider head coach Steve Peterson to bring in closer Chase Swing for the second time in two days. Swing got the last four outs to pick up his third save of the year, allowing two runs, one earned, with three strikeouts.

"I was very impressed today. We swung the bats and kept pressure on [SLU]," Peterson said. "We moved runners and executed and went the other way. Offensively this was the best day we've swung the bats this season."

Peterson said Kline had good stuff but had trouble finding the strike zone consistently.

"Steve had good stuff today but really lost command once he got in the stretch. With the way the game was going, I didn't want to extend anyone on the staff. Danny came in and did a good job and we helped out the pitching staff with the way we swung the bats."

The Blue Raiders looked like they might get on the board in the first after Beachum singled with one out before Derek Phillips drove one deep to center, but SLU's Russell Taylor made a beautiful diving catch to end the inning and the threat.

Middle Tennessee did score in the third, getting a pair of two-out doubles to put a pair of runs on the board.

Michael McKenry drew a leadoff walk and scored three batters later when Beachum doubled into the gap in rightcenter. Kemp followed with a double past the third baseman, scoring Beachum for a 2-0 Blue Raider advantage.

But the homestanding Lions came right back in their half of the inning, with Jimmy Bertelson singling to leadoff before a triple to rightcenter by Ryan Spencer. Kline then walked Jason Waguespack to put runners on the corners with no one out, but the junior lefthander worked his way out of the jam with two strikeouts and a weak flyout to short center, keeping the Blue Raiders in the lead, 2-1.

SLU knotted the game in the fourth, though. Colby Tyler led off with a double, moved to third on a sacrifice bunt and scored on Jeff Janzen's groundout, tying the game at two.

The Blue Raiders regained the lead in the fifth thanks to a pair of walks and two hit batsmen, with Kemp picking up the RBI after being hit with the bases loaded. Phillips followed with a two-run single to left to give Middle Tennessee a 5-2 lead.

Eakes collected just his third career hit to leadoff the seventh, a solo homer over the wall in leftfield to expand the Blue Raider advantage to 6-2. Middle Tennessee added three more runs in the inning to take a 9-2 lead, including a two-run double by Carroll and a sacrifice fly from Chuck Akers.

But the Lions would not go away, scoring four runs in their half of the seventh to cut it back to a three-run lead for Middle Tennessee. SLU got a pair of singles with a walk in-between off Blue Raider reliever Jeff Kasser before Trent Hebert's blast over the wall in rightcenter, a grand slam to make it 9-6 Middle Tennessee.

The seesaw battle swung back toward the Blue Raiders in the eighth. After a leadoff single and stolen base by McNamee, Eakes doubled to rightcenter for a 10-6 lead.

In the ninth, Carroll walked and scored on Ryan Darnell's double to rightcenter. McNamee drove in a run with a single and the final two runs scored on Kemp's two-run single to leftcenter.

Middle Tennessee continues its eight-game road swing against Lipscomb on Tuesday and Belmont on Wednesday in Nashville. Tuesday's first pitch at Dugan Field is at 2 p.m, with Wednesday's contest starting at 3 p.m. at Greer Stadium. The Blue Raiders return home next weekend to face 2003 College World Series participant Southwest Missouri State in a three-game series starting Friday at Reese Smith Field.

GAME NOTES

Senior Derek Phillips made his second start of the year, batting cleanup and serving as the designated hitter ... Sophomore Chase Eakes made his third start of the year and first in leftfield ... Shane Kemp's double in the third extended his hitting streak to five games ... Junior Steve Kline

lasted just 3.2 innings, his shortest regular season stint since lasting only 3.2 innings at Western Kentucky on April 25, 2003. It was also the shortest regular season stint of his career ... Kemp started the game in centerfield, his second straight start in center, and moved to rightfield in the sixth. The senior played all three outfield positions in the series after playing leftfield in the first game on Saturday ... Sophomore Jeff Beachum had three hits in the game, his eighth career three-hit outing and the first since May 11, 2003, versus Lipscomb ... Brett Carroll's single in the second extended his hitting streak to six games ... Ryan Darnell's RBI double in the ninth was his first hit of the year and the first extra base hit of his career.

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