Raiders Score Twice in Ninth for 9-8 Victory

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee scored two runs in the bottom of the ninth with the aid of just one hit, as Nate Jaggers drew a bases loaded walk to force in the game-winner for a 9-8 victory over Arkansas State in Sun Belt action Saturday afternoon at Reese Smith Field. The Blue Raiders (22-13, 5-6 SBC) blew a two-run lead in the top of the ninth, with ASU's Mike Sirianni belting a wind-blown, three-run homer to give the Indians an 8-7 advantage, the second straight game ASU had a big inning in the ninth. The visitors scored five times in the frame on Friday night to take a 9-4 win. But Middle Tennessee fought back on Saturday, as Shane Kemp led off with a bloop single and Marcus Taylor put down a sacrifice bunt. Jeff Beachum then reached on catcher's interference. On a full count pitch to pinch-hitter Chris LeGuenec, both runners took off, with Kemp stealing third easily. The senior scored when the throw went into leftfield, tying the game at eight. ASU (18-18, 3-8) reliever Chris Rich then had trouble finding the plate, walking the next three batters - pinch-hitter Ryan Darnell, Eric McNamee and Jaggers. The final free pass forced in Beachum with the winning run, evening the three-game series at one. Steve Kline (2-2), who allowed the three-run homer in the top of the ninth, got the win for Middle Tennessee. Rich (0-1) took the loss after coming in from third base to start the ninth. The rubber game between the two teams Sunday starts at 1 p.m., with Middle Tennessee sending BJ Church (1-0, 4.02 ERA) and Arkansas State going with Karnie Vertz (2-3, 5.86). The Indians held a 3-0 advantage after two innings only to watch the Blue Raiders score once in the third and three times in the fourth. Arkansas State tied the game in the fifth before Middle Tennessee scored once in the sixth and ASU knotted the game at five with a run in the seventh. The Blue Raiders got two in the eighth before the wild-and-woolly ninth. Rich singled in the first run of the game in the first for a 1-0 ASU lead. The Indians scored twice more in the second with three straight singled, the last a bunt down the third base line. Brett Carroll's throw went into rightfield, allowing a run to score, and Brad Burkhead's sacrifice fly

two batters later made it 3-0 ASU. Eric McNamee hit his second homer of the season, also a wind-blown shot, to leadoff the third, before the Blue Raiders struck for three runs in the fourth. Beachum was hit before Chuck Akers and McNamee both drew walks in the fourth. Jaggers then lined a ball off the glove of Sirianni at shortstop, allowing two runs to score and tie the contest at three. Derek Phillips then floated a soft single into center, plating McNamee with the go-ahead run. An error, two ground balls and a balk tied the game for ASU in the fifth. Akers drew his second walk of the contest in the sixth, went to third on McNamee's single and scored on a Jaggers groundout, giving Middle Tennessee a 5-4 lead. Another error opened the door for ASU in the seventh, and Hudson Smart and Sirianni followed with singles to score the run and tie the game at five. ASU's only error of the contest, a booted ball in the hole by Siraianni, started the two-run eighth for the Blue Raiders. McNamee sacrificed the runner over before Jaggers' infield single deep in the hole to Sirianni. Akers scored on a balk, the third called in the contest, and Jaggers later came across on Brett Carroll's triple to rightcenter, extending the third baseman's hit streak to a career-high 12 games. In the top of the ninth, Middle Tennessee's Eric Blevins walked pinch-hitter Elliott Jacobs with one out and the Blue Raiders went to the bullpen again, this time for Kline. The lefthander was a perfect 3-for-3 in save opportunities over the last two weeks, but would make one mistake. Burkhead singled before Kline got a flyout from Smart. Sirianni then took a 1-0 pitch into rightfield, getting the ball into the wind and just out of the park, giving ASU the 8-7 advantage heading the bottom of the frame. Middle Tennessee starter John Williams pitched 6.1 innings, allowing five runs, two earned, on eight hits with six strikeouts. ASU starter Derek Cunningham worked only 3.2 innings, departing during the three-run fourth. Cunningham allowed four runs on four hits with four walks and five strikeouts. But once again the Indians bullpen was very effective until the ninth. ASU's Matt Hicks gave up two runs, one earned, on two hits in 3.2 innings of work to keep his team in the contest. McNamee, Jaggers and Phillips all had two hits, while Jaggers drove in four runs. Akers scored three times without a hit and McNamee added two runs.

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