Blue Raiders show no 'mercy' towards Arkansas State

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MOBILE, Ala. - Middle Tennessee's baseball team showed no mercy in dealing Arkansas State a 12-2 beating in the opening day of the Dodge Sun Belt Championships at South Alabama's Stanky Field Wednesday.

The top-seeded Blue Raiders (38-18) pounded out 17 hits to dispose of the No. 8 seed Indians and advance in the winner's bracket with their fifth straight SBC Tournament win dating to last season when Middle Tennesseee swept the field. The game was called in the bottom of the seventh due to the 10-run rule.

"This was not a normal game for us from an offensive standpoint," Middle Tennessee coach Steve Peterson said. "Their pitcher (Ryan Hamilton) made some good pitches, but he made some bad ones and when he did we capitalized. It's a very good start to the tournament, and the game was like a No. 1 seed playing a No. 8 seed, although that certainly is not what we expected after the tough games we've had with Arkansas State this year."

Middle Tennessee received contributions throughout the lineup as every Blue Raider starter collected at least one hit. Catcher Troy Harp, left fielder Shane Kemp and designated hitter Nate Jaggers led the hit parade with three hits each and combined for three home runs and 10 of the 12

RBI.

"Hitting is contagious," said Kemp, who delivered his third two-home run game this season. "We started hitting up and down the order and people got hot. I don't think this team has put it all together yet this season so maybe we are starting to hit our stride."

Kemp was 3-for-4 with two home runs, a double and four RBI, while Harp was 3-for-3 with a grand slam and four RBI in the No. 9 spot in the order. Jaggers, hitting in the cleanup spot for the first time this season, was 3-for-4 with two RBI and two runs scored and drove in Middle Tennessee's first two runs.

The offensive avalanche was more than enough for junior pitcher Chris Mobley, who went all seven innings, allowed four hits and two runs, one earned. He struck out five while improving to 7-4 on the season.

"I started a little rough, but I didn't change my philosophy," Mobley said. "I just kept going after them and then my teammates gave me some runs to work with, and I settled in."

Jaggers got the Blue Raiders on the board with a RBI single in the first to plate Chuck Akers and give Middle Tennessee a 1-0 lead. Jaggers' third-inning single pushed Eric McNamee plateward for a 2-0 lead, but the Indians (29-27) pulled to within 2-1 in the fourth with an unearned run.

The game turned in the fourth when Kemp, Jeff Beachum, and Marcus Taylor reached in succession to start the inning, then Harp unloaded on a Hamilton offering for a long grand slam to break the game open.

"I just want to do anything to help the team," Harp said. "Anything I do with my bat is a plus. The runs just gave Mobley more confidence and allowed him to not have to be as fine with his pitches."

Derek Phillips (2-for-5) and Beachum (2-for-4) also had multi-hit games to pace the Blue Raiders. Middle Tennessee will face UL-Lafayette Thursday at 6:30 p.m.

GAME NOTES:
Junior Nate Jaggers batted in the cleanup spot for the first time this season and just the second time in his career. The only other time came during his freshman year in 2002. Jaggers extended his hitting streak to a career-high 11 games with an RBI single in the first. He also had his third three-hit game of the season ... Junior Eric McNamee singled in the third, his 81st hit of the year, moving the second baseman out of a tie with Eddie Pye and into 10thplace on the single-season hits list. The single also moved McNamee out of a tie with Josh Renick and into second place with 65 singles ... Junior Chris Mobley's first strikeout of the game, in the second inning, moved the righthander out of a tie with Chris Crabtree and into third place on the single-season list. Mobley ended the game with five strikeouts and has 121 for the season ... Mobley picked up the victory with seven innings of four-hit work, striking out five. He picked up his seventh win, tying John Williams for the team lead, and won for the first time in five starts and first since April 23 at South Alabama ... Senior Shane Kemp homered twice in the contest, his 13th and 14th of the season, and third two-homer game of the season. Kemp homered twice versus Louisiana-Lafayette (4-2) and at New Orleans (5/9). Kemp also tied his career-high with three hits in the contest, his fifth career three-hit outing, all this season ... Troy Harp tied his career-high with three hits in the game, his first three-hit game of the year and first since April 26, 2002, versus Louisiana-Lafayette. The senior also had four RBIs in the contest, tying

a career-high ... Senior Chuck Akers walked twice in the contest, moving past George Zimmerman into fifth on the all-time list with 104 ... Sophomore Jeff Beachum had two singles in the game, moving him into seventh on the single-season list with 56 ... The Blue Raiders extended their winning streak to five games in the Sun Belt Championships and improved to 10-4 against Arkansas State since 2001, 2-0 in the SBC Tournament ... Middle Tennessee also improved to 8-3 all-time in the Sun Belt Championships.

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