Blue Raiders ride Williams' arm, clutch hitting to 8-6 victory

May 28, 2004 · MT Media Relations

MOBILE, Ala. - Pitching has been the strong suit of Middle Tennessee's baseball success all season and the trend has continued in the Dodge Sun Belt Championships at South Alabama's Stanky Field.

The Blue Raiders received another stellar pitching performance from John Williams - the second such strong outing in as many days in the tournament - and redshirt freshman Matt Scott got the final two outs for his first career save as No. 1 seed Middle Tennessee turned back No. 4 Louisiana-Lafayette, 8-6, to advance into Friday's winner's bracket finals.

Middle Tennessee (39-18) will face the winner of Friday afternoon's elimination game between Louisiana-Lafayette and New Mexico State Friday at 6:30 p.m., with a date in the title game on the line. The Blue Raiders won their fifth straight overall and captured their sixth straight triumph in Sun Belt Conference Championship action, dating to last season.

"Our next goal is to win this tournament championship and get to a (NCAA) Regional tournament," Middle Tennessee coach Steve Peterson said. "Every win we get moves us closer to that goal. You could feel it in the dugout, guys were playing through mistakes and our club really battled. Hopefully the best is yet to come."

Williams established a career high in wins by notching his eighth triumph in 11 decisions after going 8-1/3 innings and scattering nine hits against the SBC's top hitting team. He allowed just four earned runs and struck out nine before giving way to Scott with the tying run at the plate in the ninth. The nine strikeouts give Williams 107 for the season and marks the first time the Blue Raiders have had

two pitchers with 100-plus strikeouts in the same season.

"It was a blast, and I had fun with it," Williams said. "The last time I faced them they beat me and the key to that was I wasn't hitting my spots. I knew coming in I had to hit my spots. I think the big thing is I kept the ball in the park tonight and let my defense do the work."

Derek Phillips (2-for-4, one RBI), Nate Jaggers (2-for-3, one RBI, two runs scored) and Jeff Beachum (2-for-5, one run, one RBI) all had multi-hit games as the Blue Raiders managed 11 hits. Phillips had a pair of doubles and Marcus Taylor added one two-bagger.

The Blue Raiders took a 1-0 lead in the second without the benefit of a hit when Cajun starter Ian Pecoraro walked Eric McNamee with the bases loaded. Pecoraro walked six in his 1-1/3 innings of work. Louisiana-Lafayette walked nine as a staff. After Louisiana-Lafayette took a 2-1 lead in the third, Middle Tennessee came back with a three spot in the fifth, highlighted by Taylor's two-run double and Troy Harp's sacrifice fly, to take 4-2 lead.

Louisiana-Lafayette battled back and tied the game with single runs in the seventh and eighth, but back came the Blue Raiders and put four runs on the board in the bottom of the eighth with Jaggers and Beachum supplying the key hits as Middle Tennessee sent nine hitters to the plate.

"Offensively, once we got their pitchers were they made mistakes, we answered," Peterson said. "We had some really big clutch hits. It's really a big win. One of the biggest we've had this year."

Williams came back out to start the ninth, but he was lifted in favor of Scott with one out and one runner aboard after the Cajuns (32-22) scored twice and cut the deficit to 8-6. Scott got the only two batters he faced and struck out clean-up hitter Rhett Buras, representing the tying run, on three pitches to notch his first career save.

GAME NOTES

Junior Nate Jaggers extended his hitting streak to a career-high 12 games with an infield single in the fifth. The designated hitter added an RBI single in the eighth ... Junior Eric McNamee had one hit and scored a run in the contest as well as drawing three walks. The second baseman moved into a tie for ninth with Justin Sims for hits in a season (82) and into a tie for second with Chris Whitehead for walks in a season (47) ... Sophomore Jeff Beachum had a pair of singles, giving the shortstop 58 singles this year, good for sixth on the single-season list ... Senior John Williams struck out nine in the contest, giving the lefthander 107 for the season. With Chris Mobley's 121 strikeouts, the duo becomes the first pair in Blue Raider history with more than 100 strikeouts in a season ... Williams moved out of a tie with Chris Norton and Marty Smith and into fourth on the all-time wins list (23) and into second on the innings pitched list (315.0) ... Williams also picked up his fourth consecutive victory and his eighth win of the year, a career-high for one season ... After stealing just one base in almost four seasons of play, senior Troy Harp now has two stolen bases in his last four games.

Printed on May 21, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/3090