Blue Raiders suffer 6-2 setback in SBC baseball tourney

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MOBILE, Ala. - Middle Tennessee's hitters got a taste of what opposing batters have been facing when they stepped into the batter's box against Louisiana-Lafayette's Kevin Ardoin Friday night.

Outstanding pitching had been the Blue Raiders' trademark through the first two games of the Dodge Sun Belt Conference Championships, but it was the Ragin' Cajuns who used strong pitching to stave elimination as they stopped Middle Tennessee 6-2 Friday at South Alabama's Stanky Field.

Ardoin pitched 7-1/3 innings, scattered seven hits and allowed just two runs, one earned to end the Blue Raiders (39-18) five-game winning streak and force a second game Saturday at 9:30 a.m. The Blue Raiders and Cajuns will meet for the sixth time with a date in the championship game on the line opposite seventh-seeded Western Kentucky 45 minutes following the completion of the morning game.

"You have to tip your cap to Ardoin," Peterson said. "He's their ace and they held him because we had heard he had been having some arm problems, but he was outstanding tonight and he just whipped us. He was sharp and he controlled the game."

Middle Tennessee was limited two hits through five innings and three through six innings before finally starting to get to Ardoin and into the Cajuns' bullpen, but it was too late.

B.J. Church (5-1) suffered his first loss in six decisions for Middle Tennessee, but he battled and pitched into the eighth inning before being forced out of the game in the eighth when he took a line drive off the ankle. Church allowed six runs, all earned, and struck out 10.

"Church battled and pitched in some bad luck but that's the way it goes," Peterson said. "We will have to turn around in a short period of time, put this one behind us and be ready to go in the morning."

Jeff Beachum (2-for-4) and Troy Harp (2-for-3) continued their strong tournament play with multi-hit games to lead Middle Tennessee. The Blue Raiders trailed 4-0 after three innings and 5-0 after seven before getting on the board with two runs in the eighth. Eric McNamee singled with one out and Chuck Akers followed with a base hit to put runners on the corner. Derek Phillips was hit by a pitch to load the bases and then Micah Cockrell was unable to handle Nate Jaggers' hard-hit grounder as two runs came home.

Middle Tennessee will be gunning for its 40th win and a date in the tournament finals for the second straight year and third time in four years Saturday.

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