Raiders Survive, Advance to Championship Game

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MOBILE, Ala. - Chuck Akers had four hits and the Blue Raiders hit four home runs en route to a 15-10 victory over Louisiana-Lafayette in an elimination game Saturday morning in the 2004 Dodge Sun Belt Championships at Stanky Field. The Blue Raiders now play Western Kentucky at 1:45 p.m. today in the tournament championship game. The Blue Raiders got off to a good start thanks to Akers, who followed an Eric McNamee walk in the third with a two-run homer over the centerfield wall. UL got a run in the bottom of the frame when Justin Merendino reached on an infield single and scored on a soft single down the rightfield line by Brad Saloom. Middle Tennessee added three more runs in the fourth, as Nate Jaggers walked and Shane Kemp followed with a double down the leftfield line. Jaggers was thrown out at the plate, but Jeff Beachum then doubled to plate Kemp. Marcus Taylor then lined his ninth homer of the year just inside the rightfield foul pole for a 5-1 Blue Raider advantage. But the Cajuns would not go away, coming back to score five runs in the bottom of the inning to take the lead. Kevin Preau hit his third homer of the tournament, a solo shot, with one out. Ryan Core doubled with two outs and scored a single from Micah Cockrell. After a hit batter and a walk loaded the bases, a wild pitch from Blue Raider reliever Chase Swing plated Cockrell. Josh Landry then looped a two-run single into rightcenter for a 6-5 UL lead. Akers doubled with one out in the fifth to set up a struggling Brett Carroll, who finally got a pitch to hit and deposited it over the wall, as the Blue Raiders regained the lead, 7-6. Middle Tennessee added to the lead in

the sixth thanks to walks to Taylor and Troy Harp. McNamee then put down a bunt that was thrown away at third. Akers then blooped a single over a drawn-in infield, plating both runners for a 10-6 edge. But again the Cajuns came back with three runs in the bottom of the inning on five hits, starting with a pair of bunt singles and Landry's third hit of the game. Saloom scored a pair with a single to right and Landry scored on a Buras shot off the wall, cutting the Blue Raider lead to 10-9. Danny Borne came on to get out of the jam with a flyout and a groundout. In the seventh Jaggers drew his third walk of the game before Kemp tripled off the wall in centerfield. Kemp later scored on a passed ball for a 12-9 advantage. The Raiders added two more runs in the eighth when Derek Phillips singled and Carroll hit his second homer of the contest, giving Middle Tennessee a 14-9 lead. UL got a run back in the bottom of the frame with singles from Merendino and Landry and a sac fly by Saloom. **GAME NOTES**

Junior Steve Kline made his eighth start of the year and first since April 20 versus Vanderbilt. The lefthander lasted just 3.2 innings, allowing five runs on seven hits ... Senior Chuck Akers went 4-for-6 in the contest, his third career four-hit game and first since May 15, 2002, versus Southwest Missouri State ... Junior Brett Carroll hit his 12th and 13th homers of the season and third at Stanky Field this season. The third baseman hit two during the series against South Alabama earlier this year.

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