Raiders Fall to WKU in Title Game

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MOBILE, Ala. - Middle Tennessee got out to a quick start but was unable to hold the lead, as seventh-seeded Western Kentucky used a seven-run fourth inning to take control and defeat the Blue Raiders, 14-4, Saturday afternoon in the championship game of the 2004 Dodge Sun Belt Championships at Stanky Field. The Blue Raiders (40-20) won earlier in the day to advance to the championship game, defeating Louisiana-Lafayette, 15-10, Saturday morning. But three games in less than 24 hours caught up to the squad, who ran out of gas in their fifth game of the tournament. WKU's Grady Hinchman (6-5), pitching on two days rest, worked six innings, allowing three runs on three hits, to get the victory. Middle Tennessee starter Shay Horseman (1-4) suffered the loss, giving up seven runs in 3.1 innings. Western Kentucky scored a run in the bottom of the first after some early wildness from Horseman. The lefthander hit two batters and walked another before a single through the right side by Matt Johnston scored a run, but Cary Page was gunned down at the plate by Shane Kemp trying to score from second on the play. The Raiders took the lead in the second when Nate Jaggers drew a leadoff walk and Shane Kemp followed with a double off the wall in center to put runners on second and third. Jeff Beachum singled home a run before a sacrifice fly to right from Chase Eakes made it 2-1. WKU tied the contest in the bottom of the inning after an infield single and a throwing error put Dennis Winn at second. A single through the left side by Jordan Newton put runners on the corners before a sacrifice fly in foul territory down the rightfield line from Matt Ransdell plated the run. A solo homer to right from Derek Phillips put the Raiders back ahead 3-2 in the third, but three straight singles with two outs in the bottom of the inning, including an RBI single from Antown Towns, tied the score at three. WKU added seven runs in the fourth on seven hits, with Newton and Ransdell both collecting a pair of singles in the inning. Ransdell had an RBI single to score Newton before a double from Matt Gunning. Dominic Rio's dumper down the rightfield line scored a pair, as did a double off the rightcenter field wall by Towns. Newton later added an RBI single for a 10-3 Hilltoppers lead. Page's solo homer in the fifth made it 11-3 WKU. The Raiders added a run in the eighth after a leadoff double from Josh Archer. Pinch-hitter Ryan Darnell singled to right and Archer later scored on a wild pitch. WKU added three runs in the eighth on a pair of

homers, a two-run shot from Towns and a solo homer by Dennis Winn. The Blue Raiders must await their fate and will watch the NCAA Baseball Selection Show Monday at 11 a.m. on ESPN2 to find out if their season will continue. **GAME NOTES**

Middle Tennessee and Western Kentucky matched up in the championship game for the second straight year. The only other time that has happened in 26 previous years of the Sun Belt came from 1980-82 when South Alabama and South Florida played three straight years.

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