Blue Raiders fall at Sun Belt Tournament

Season ends with 2-1 loss to Western Kentucky

May 8, 2008 · David Powell

TROY, Ala. - Middle Tennessee took an early lead and held it until the 5th inning as the Blue Raiders (22-31) fell 2-1 in a hard-fought contest against the Western Kentucky Hilltoppers (27-29) in their final game of the Sun Belt Conference Tournament at Trojan Softball Complex Thursday. The Blue Raiders came into the game needing a win after dropping their first game of the double-elimination tournament to the Florida International Golden Panthers 3-2 on Wednesday. Lindsey Vander Lugt (16-22) made her second straight start of the tournament for the Blue Raiders. The lefty gave up no earned runs on six hits, while striking out six and walking none, in the complete game loss. "I thought Lindsey pitched one of her best games. We rode her shoulders for the last three weeks and she did a great job for us," said Head Coach Sue Nevar. Ryan Rogge (16-14) got the win for the Hilltoppers, retiring the final five batters of the game in the relief appearance. Western Kentucky should have scored in the bottom of the 2nd inning if not for a stellar defensive play by Caitlin McLure. Lead-off batter Rebecca Horesky reached on an error by Blue Raider third baseman Whitney Darlington before Shelby Smith hit a single through the left side, bringing up Kelsey McCauley. The shortstop lined a ball into left field for a single, but Blue Raider McLure lasered a ball to catcher Katie Mielke who tagged out sprinting Horesky at home. Middle Tennessee broke the deadlock in the top of the 4th inning off a timely RBI hit by Justine Cerda. Corrie Abel singled to left field and advanced to second base on her seventh stolen base of the season. Reigning Sun Belt Conference player of the week Cerda nailed a RBI single to left field to put the Blue Raiders up 1-0. Cerda and Abel went a combined 4-for-6 with a RBI to lead the Blue

Raiders. "There are a lot of individual heroes I could name but we have been stressing the team all year long," said Nevar. "It is a close-nit squad and we won as a team and lost as a team. Everyone contributed greatly at different points in the season." The Hilltoppers tied the game at a run apiece in the bottom of the 5th inning. McCauley singled to right field and advanced to second base on a sacrifice bunt by Ashley Contreras before Terri Ellingsworth loaded the bases with a single to centerfield. The next batter, Rachelle Boucher, lined out to Ashley Cline. However, the second baseman's attempt to end the inning with a double play backfired as her toss to Brittney Banania standing at second base was too high, allowing McCauley to cross the plate. Western Kentucky scored the winning run in the final inning. Shelby Smith singled through the right side and Sam Cronk reached on a Cerda fielding error before both runners advanced into scoring position on a McCauley sacrifice bunt to the left side. With two outs, Ellingsworth nailed a bouncing ball up the middle that was mishandled by Cline. Her throw to first base was just late, allowing Smith to score. "I am so proud of everyone this season. When it comes to tournament time, this loss is proof that at this time of year that it is anyone's ballgame. At the beginning of the tournament, we asked the kids to give it everything they had and leave it all on the field. We can honestly say we have done that. We played our hearts out and it just didn't fall our way today," said Nevar The athletic department at Middle Tennessee would like to thank all those associated with Blue Raider Softball for a great year and we look forward to seeing you back at Blue Raider Field for the 2009 season. Be sure to check back at GoBlueRaiders.com during the off-season for all the latest news on MT Softball. Said Nevar, "One of the many positive traits that this year's team had that we need to carry into next season is their never say die attitude. The four seniors contributed so much more than just offense and defense. They will be sorely missed."

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