

Blue Raiders Drop Opener Against Ball State

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Three home runs accounted for all of Middle Tennessee's offense but the trio of circuit clouts was not enough as Ball State took a 7-4 win in the opener for both teams in front of 618 at Reese Smith Friday afternoon.

Sophomore catcher Michael McKenry had his first career multi-homer game with a pair of solo blasts in the opener and Nate Jagers connected for a two-run shot but the long-distance bombs were overshadowed by a 12-hit performance by the Cardinals.

Middle Tennessee (0-1) was led by McKenry, who was 2-for-4 with two home runs and a pair of RBIs. No other Blue Raider had a multi-hit game in the opener.



The Cardinals (1-0) opened the game with leadoff-hitter Mike Sullivan knocking the first pitch into left field for a single. Sullivan stole second with one out before Marc Franz walked to put runners at first and second with one out. Brad Miller followed with a single to plate the game's first run when Sullivan scored. The Cardinals took advantage of a two-out error by Middle Tennessee's Josh Archer for the second run of the inning.

Trailing 2-0 entering the bottom of the third, Middle Tennessee finally broke through against Ball State ace Joe Ness via the long ball. Sophomore catcher McKenry led off the bottom of the inning when he drilled an 0-1 pitch over the fence in right-center to cut the deficit in half. It marked the second straight season McKenry belted a round-tripper in his first at-bat, after delivering a grand slam in his first collegiate at-bat in 2004.

Eric McNamee followed with a single and was erased at second following a fielder's choice by Nathan Hines, who promptly stole second. Nate Jagers gave Middle Tennessee its first lead when he blasted his 17th career home run over the left field fence to stake the Blue Raiders to a 3-2 edge.

Middle Tennessee's lead was short lived; however, as Ball State stormed back with a three spot in

the top of the fourth with Eric Earnhart's double being the big blow. The Cardinals scored two more runs on fielder's choices to reclaim a 5-3 cushion.

McKenry, who registered his fourth multi-RBI game of his career, continued his power display in the bottom of the fourth when he homered in his second consecutive at-bat to pull Middle Tennessee to within 5-4.

Blevins gave way to rookie southpaw Jimmy Kelly after allowing five runs, four earned, six hits, striking out five and issuing three free passes in five innings of work. Kelly was impressive in his debut, pitching 1-1/3 innings of no-hit relief before being lifted in favor of senior transfer Kyler Wetherington with one out in the top of the seventh.

Former Eagleville standout Josh Anderson pitched 1-2/3 of scoreless relief before Jeff Kasser came in to pitch the ninth. The Cardinals picked up two big insurance runs to go on top 7-4 entering the bottom of the final inning.

The Blue Raiders went quietly in the bottom of the ninth as the Cardinals took the first game of the series.

The two teams will meet again in the second game of the three-game series on Saturday. First pitch is scheduled for 2 PM at Reese Smith Field.

NOTES:

The Blue Raiders dropped to 7-11 on opening day under Steve Peterson ... This was the first-ever meeting on the diamond between MT and Ball State ... True freshman Nathan Hines and junior transfer Todd Martin made their first career starts as Blue Raiders today in the season opener against Ball State ... The first hit of the 2005 season was delivered by shortstop Jeff Beachum in the second inning ... Nate Jagers' third inning home run was the 17th of his career ... Michael McKenry's third inning round-tripper was the third of his career. McKenry then equaled his home run out-put all of last season with another blast in the fourth ... Nathan Hines picked up his first collegiate hit when he singled to left-center in the fifth inning ... Due to the weather in Muncie, Ind., the Ball State team has only been outside to practice two days and both times came this week ... The Cardinals open the season with 15 consecutive road games, which ranks as the second longest stretch in school history.

QUOTES

P Eric Blevins: "After I got through the first few hitters I finally started settling down and finding the strike zone. The first inning hurt me because I bet I threw 30 pitches, but then once I calmed down it was a whole other story."

C Michael McKenry: "I got lucky and hit two home runs early in the game that actually didn't end up helping us. When I had a chance (with runners on base) late in the game I failed. It's like heartbreaking emotions right there."

Head Coach Steve Peterson on McKenry: "Michael did a great job behind the plate. He had two home runs. He was a threat behind the plate and he was a threat at the plate, he drove in some runs. He is a talented boy and had a nice opening day."

Head Coach Steve Peterson on today's game: "You hate getting beat, but Ball State is a pretty good team. They are experienced and came out supporting their pitcher. They made the plays when they had to. They did not panic today. They played better than we did today.

"I hate we lost but we got out there and played. It's just February 18. We have a lot of competition on this field and I have to see guys play and see what they can do. We can not base anything on just one game."

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