Baseball Falls to Ohio State, 8-4

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DOTHAN, Ala. - A six-run sixth inning broke open a one-run game, enabling Ohio State to defeat Middle Tennessee, 8-4, Friday in the first game of the ScreenTech Wiregrass Baseball Classic.

Ohio State led 2-1 heading into the sixth, but the Blue Raiders threatened to tie the game before popping out with the bases loaded. The Buckeyes then used three walks from Blue Raider pitching to get a run before a two-run double and a bases-clearing two-bagger gave OSU an 8-1 lead en route to the victory.

Blue Raider starter Eric Blevins (0-2) took the loss but deserved better, allowing two runs, one earned, on nine hits before departing. He walked three and struck out two.

Middle Tennessee (1-2) stranded six and committed three errors, with newcomer Todd Martin accouting for four hits with a perfect day at the plate, including a solo homer.

"I was disappointed with the way we came out, not having fun and playing baseball," Middle Tennessee head coach Steve Peterson said. "When one thing bad happened, we got down and didn't bounce back.

"You have to give Ohio State some credit. They are a very unselfish team and got big hits when they had runners on base."

The Blue Raiders had trouble fielding in the second inning, and it cost them a run. OSU's Mike Rabin reached on an infield single with one out before a two-out grounder up the middle looked to end the inning. But second baseball Eric McNamee was trying to field the ball and tag the runner coming into second at the same time, and the ball fell out of his glove.

McNamee immediately got a chance to redeem himself with a routine grounder, but he kicked that one and was slow to retrieve it, with Rabin taking notice and breaking for the plate. McNamee's throw was good and on time to get the runner, but catcher Michael McKenry also dropped the ball on the tag, allowing the run to score for a 1-0 Buckeyes lead.

Middle Tennessee evened the game at one in the top of the third after a leadoff walk from McKenry and a fisted single to right by Martin. A groundout moved the runners up and McNamee walked to load the bases before an RBI groundout from Nathan Hines tied the score.

But the Buckeyes (1-0) came right back in their half of the inning, with three straight two-out singles, the last by Cody Caughenbaugh to plate Steve Caravati for a 2-1 OSU advantage.

Blevins worked out of jams in the fourth and fifth innings, recording his first two strikeouts in the fourth and getting a popout and flyout to end the fifth.

The Blue Raiders looked to tie the game in the sixth, loading the bases with a hit batsman and singles from Jeff Beachum and Chase Eakes, but McKenry skied a popup to end the threat.

Ohio State scored in its half of the frame after a one-out triple by leadoff man Jacob Howell. Three straight walks, the last from reliever Jimmy Kelly, forced in a run before a two-run pinch-hit double from Adam Schneider made it 5-1 Buckeyes. A bases-clearing double from Paul Farinacci made it 8-1 OSU, as the Big Ten opponent plated six runs on just three hits and four walks.

Middle Tennessee scored twice in the eighth after Hines was hit by a pitch and Nate Jaggers doubled. Marcus Taylor drove in a run with a single to center before Jeff Beachum plated Jaggers with a sacrifice fly. Martin added the final run of the contest with a solo homer in the ninth.

OSU starter Mike Madsen (1-0) got the win with five innings of work, allowing one run on three hits with four strikeouts. Freshman Cory Luebke worked three innings and closer Trey Fausnaugh got the final three outs.

"I thought [Madsen] made some mistakes up in the strike zone, but we weren't able to take advantage of them. We made some mistakes early and it cost is a run, and then our relief pitching wasn't real good."

Howell was 3-for-4 for the Buckeyes, while Rabin and Caravati each scored twice. Taylor went 2-for-4 for Middle Tennessee.

The Blue Raiders play another Big Ten foe on Saturday, taking on Iowa at 2 p.m.

GAME NOTES

Freshman Nathan Hines drove in his first career run with a groundout in the third inning ... Junior Alan Woodward made his first career appearance in the sixth inning ... Junior transfer Todd Martin hit his first home run as a Blue Raider, a solo shot in the ninth inning ... Middle Tennessee made three errors in the game and now has six in three contests this season ... After making only 10 errors in more than 250 chances last season, senior Eric McNamee already has three miscues in the first three games in 2005.

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