Clutch performances power Blue Raiders to pair of wins

Pick up crucial Sun Belt victories

April 4, 2009 · David Powell

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Blue Raiders have faced adversity the entire season and showed Saturday afternoon why no one should count them out as they opened a three-game series against North Texas with two wins at Blue Raider Field. Middle Tennessee was coming off a tough stretch after dropping three games to No. 20 Louisiana-Lafayette and was looking to rebound in the Sun Belt standings after reaching the halfway point in the conference schedule last weekend. Lindsey Vander Lugt set a new personal best in strikeouts as Middle Tennessee (8-24, 3-11 Sun Belt) won 1-0 over the Mean Green (19-18, 6-7 Sun Belt) in the first game of the day. Vander Lugt (6-11) gave up just one hit in her third complete-game shutout of the season. The lefty fanned a career-high 11 batters to just two walks in seven innings pitched. Ashley Lail (7-7) allowed one run on seven hits in the complete game performance for the visitors. Vander Lugt started out strong for the Blue Raiders allowing no hits in the opening inning before striking out the side in the top of the second. To add to her exploits on the day, the junior moved into second place in school history for most career appearances with 118. She trails former Blue Raider Jennifer Martinez by 18 for the most all-time. Middle Tennessee scored what proved to be the game-winning run in the third inning. Kelsey Dortch continued her prowess in the leadoff position with a double to right field before advancing to third base on a sacrifice bunt by Caitlin McLure. Jessica Ives walked two batters later, bringing up Shelby Barrett. The freshman smashed a single to right field for her sixth RBI of the season. Barrett had had a career performance on the offensive side of the ball for the home team. The freshman was a combined 5-for-5 on the afternoon with a walk and tied a

career-high with three RBIs. The Blue Raiders almost doubled their lead in the sixth inning when they put runners on second and third after Barrett and Popham singles up the middle. However, pinch hitter Caty Jutson and Kandra Singleton grounded out to end the frame. Middle Tennessee used three crucial hits in the final inning to power to a 3-2 victory over the Mean Green in the second game. Vander Lugt allowed no earned runs on four hits in her second complete game of the afternoon. Kayla Lawson (5-4) gave up three runs on six hits with six strikeouts for North Texas. The Blue Raiders took the lead in the opening inning. Dortch walked and advanced to second base on McLure's second sacrifice bunt of the day. A one-out single moved the sophomore centerfielder to third and Barrett was again on hand again to nail an RBI to put the home team out front 1-0. Middle Tennessee failed to score a run despite loading the bases with no outs in the fourth inning. Barrett drew a five-pitch walk, Popham reached on a fielder's choice and Joy was hit by a pitch to load the bases before three-straight outs. Popham finished 3-for-7 on the afternoon with the game-winning hit in the second contest. North Texas took a 2-1 lead in the top of the fifth inning off a two-RBI triple by pinch hitter Sarah Jones. Martha Davis had seven defensive putouts on the day to surpass the 100-assist mark for the first time in her career. The senior made several highlight-reel stops for Middle Tennessee. The Blue Raiders displayed clutch, late-game heroics with two outs in the final inning. McLure used her pace to beat out what looked like a routine groundout to second base before advancing to second for her third stolen base of the day. With two outs, Barrett singled to right field and advanced to second on the throw, scoring McLure and bringing up Popham. The first baseman smashed a ball 2-1 pitch to the wall in left field to score the game-winning run. The Blue Raiders return to action on Sunday. Opening pitch has been moved to 11 a.m. due to the expected sever weather.

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