Martin, Scott Lead 12-2 Baseball Victory

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. - Matt Scott recorded a career-high 10 strikeouts in seven-plus innings and Todd Martin collected five of Middle Tennessee's 18 hits, as the Blue Raiders defeated Arkansas-Little Rock, 12-2, Friday night at Gary Hogan Field in the Sun Belt Conference opener for both teams.

Scott (4-0) allowed two runs and struck out 10 in 7.1 innings, giving the Blue Raiders another strong pitching performance and helping the Blue Raiders start SBC play with a victory for the fourth time in five seasons. Middle Tennessee (9-10, 1-0 SBC) also extended its regular season Sun Belt win streak to nine and improved to 12-1 all-time against UALR (12-15, 0-1).

"Matt Scott did an outstanding job, really matching [UALR's] pitcher in the early innings and giving is another strong outing," head coach Steve Peterson said. "He was strong and got big outs when he needed it and I only pulled him because he sat in the dugout a long time in the sixth and seventh innings, and I was just being precautionary."

Martin was 5-for-6 with three RBIs, the first five-hit game for a Blue Raider since Josh Archer's five against the Trojans here in Little Rock in 2003. Middle Tennessee scored nine runs in the sixth, seventh and eighth innings to break open a close game and end a five-game losing streak in the process.

"Jeff Beachum played an outstanding shortstop tonight and then he goes and gets four hits. We

moved the lineup around some and put [Todd] Martin in the two spot and it worked out well today," Peterson added.

Kyler Wetherington got the final five outs of the game, striking out three. UALR starter Bennett Cromer (2-3) took the loss, giving up five runs on 10 hits in six-plus innings. The Blue Raiders knocked around the Trojans bullpen, scoring seven runs on eight hits in three innings.

The Blue Raiders got out to a quick start, with Martin reaching on a one-out single in the first and Marcus Taylor belting his second home run in two games, taking an 0-2 pitch over the wall in rightfield for a 2-0 lead.

Middle Tennessee got another run in the fourth thanks to an error and two infield singles. Nathan Hines reached on a one-out error and Eric McNamee singled off the pitcher's glove with two outs. Martin then lofted a soft liner up the middle off the glove of UALR second baseman Mitchell Webb, with Hines scoring from third on the play for a 3-0 advantage.

The Trojans got a run back in the fourth when Tommy Bryant singled with one out and Tim Lawrence tripled off the wall in right, allowing Bryant to score from first on the play.

But the Blue Raiders added to the lead in the sixth, with McNamee drawing a two-out walk and Martin singling off the first baseman's glove. Nate Jaggers then delivered the big blow, a double off the wall in centerfield to plate two runs for a 5-1 advantage.

Middle Tennessee scored four runs in the seventh to break open the game, though it could have been much more.

Michael McKenry led off with an infield single to chase Cromer. McKenry stole second before Beachum laid down a perfect bunt past the pitcher for an infield single. McKenry tried to score from second on the play, but was gunned down at the plate for the first out of the inning. Beachum stole second against reliever Clayton Dill and broke for third three pitches later, but Dill nailed him with an inside move for out number two.

That's when the wheels came off for the home team, with Chase Eakes and Hines both battling for two-out walks before Josh Archer smashed a ball to centerfield and off the glove of Lawrence. Both runs scored on the play, and Archer later scored on a wild pitch.

The Blue Raiders were not done in the inning, with McNamee walking, stealing second, going to third on a wild pitch and scoring on Martin's third infield single of the night, a rocket off the glove of the first baseman.

Middle Tennessee added to the lead again in the eighth, taking advantage of some more Trojan wildness.

Eakes was hit to start the frame, and Hines singled to leftcenter, allowing pinch-runner Doug Birkofer to score on the play. Archer then doubled and later scored on Martin's fifth hit of the game, a single to right. Taylor's RBI single plated McNamee with two outs in the frame, giving the Blue Raiders a 12-1 advantage.

UALR got a run in the eighth after a double from Jimmy Scott and a bloop single by Bryant, but it was too little, too later.

Beachum tied his career high with four hits, while McNamee scored three times. Jaggers, Taylor and Hines all had two hits, with Taylor driving in three runs and Jaggers collecting two RBIs. The Blue Raiders stranded 15 runners despite the season-high 12 runs.

Bryant and Lawrence collected three hits apiece and six of UALR's nine hits in the game.

The two teams play again Saturday at 2 p.m., weather permitting, and conclude the three-game series Sunday at 1 p.m. The Blue Raiders return home Tuesday to face Tennessee Tech at 7 p.m. at Reese Smith Field.

GAME NOTES

The win ended a five-game losing streak for Middle Tennessee, the longest skid since a six-game stretch to end the 2002 campaign ... Middle Tennessee improved to 4-1 in Sun Belt openers since joining the league ... The Blue Raiders also upped their all-time mark to 12-1 against Arkansas-Little Rock, including 5-1 in Little Rock ... Todd Martin's five hits eclipsed his previous high of four set earlier this season against Ohio State ... Jeff Beachum tied his career high with four hits, the fourth time in his career he has collected four hits in a game ... Matt Scott recorded a career-high 10 strikeouts, besting his previous mark of five set against Southeastern Louisiana earlier this season. It was also the first double-digit strikeout performance for a Blue Raider this year and the first since BJ Church collected 10 against Louisiana-Lafayette in the Sun Belt Championships on May 28, 2004 ... The Blue Raiders stole six bases as a team, the most this season and the most since swiping six against Dayton on March 21, 2004 ... Marcus Taylor's homer in the first was his second of the season and second in two games after homering against Lipscomb on Tuesday.

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