Raiders Hold on for 9-8 Victory

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee jumped out to an early five-run lead and hung on, with Allan Woodward picking up his second save of the weekend in a 9-8 victory over Western Kentucky Sunday afternoon at Nick Denes Field. The Blue Raiders (16-15, 4-4 Sun Belt) scored twice in the first and three more times in the third, but the homestanding Hilltoppers got four runs in the bottom of the third to make it a one-run game. The two teams traded single runs in the sixth and seventh before Middle Tennessee added two runs in the eighth. Those two runs proved to be the difference, as WKU (12-23, 3-9) scored twice in the bottom of the ninth, but Woodward got the final two outs for his second save of the series to five the Blue Raiders the series win. Middle Tennessee starter Tyler Copeland (4-1) picked up the win, giving up five runs on seven hits in 5.1 innings. Copeland walked three and struck out three. The Blue Raider bullpen was superb, with Aaron Wallus, Kyler Wetherington, Chase Swing and Woodward allowing two earned runs in 3.2 innings, striking out two. Middle Tennessee pounded out 14 hits in the victory, including two each from Eric McNamee, Todd Martin, Nate Jaggers, Adam Warren and Nathan Hines. Warren drove in three runs and Martin had two RBIs. The Blue Raiders got off to a good start, scoring twice in the top of the first inning on three hits. McNamee led off with a single and moved to third when a pickoff throw from WKU catcher Jordan Newton sailed over the head of the first baseman and into the bullpen. A one-out single to right from Jaggers scored McNamee. Warren followed with single and both runners moved up on a wild pitch. Marcus Taylor's groundout plated Jaggers for an early 2-0 lead. Middle Tennessee added to the lead in the third, starting with another leadoff single from McNamee. After a one-out single by Jaggers, Warren jumped all over a hanging breaking ball and deposited it over the wall in leftcenter, a three-run homer and the first round-tripper of Warren's career, for a 5-0 Blue Raiders lead. A blooper down the rightfield line by Eric Scriven to leadoff the bottom of the third for WKU caused a major collision between McNamee and Taylor, with Taylor leaving the game after a long delay for both players. Corteze Armstrong scored Scriven with a single to leftfield and Tim Grogan was walked one batter later. Newton then drilled a fastball over the wall in leftfield for a three-run shot, cutting the deficit to 5-4. The Blue Raiders did little against WKU reliever J.C. Faircloth until the sixth when Jeff

Beachum singled with one out and Hines followed with an RBI double into leftcenter, scoring Beachum for a 6-4 Middle Tennessee edge. The Hilltoppers cut the lead to one again in the bottom of the inning, with Casey Hamilton singling to leadoff. After an out the Blue Raiders went to the bullpen for Wallus, who allowed an infield single to Scriven before a soft liner through the leftside by Armstrong plated Hamilton. Middle Tennessee came back with a run in the top of the seventh, starting with a leadoff single from Martin. The junior stole second and scored on a two-out single to rightcenter by Chase Eakes after a 10-pitch at-bat, giving the Blue Raiders a 7-5 advantage. But WKU cut the deficit to one again with a solo homer in the bottom of the inning from Marcus Ross, his fourth of the season. The Raiders added a pair of runs in the eighth but missed an opportunity to break open the game. Hines singled to leadoff and went to second on a sacrifice bunt by Alex Watson. WKU reliever Stephen Muck then walked Josh Archer and hit Wayne Kendrick to load the bases. Martin doubled just inside the first base bag, scoring a pair of runs for a 9-6 lead. Jaggers was intentionally walked to load the bases, but Greg Durr came on to get two outs without any further damage. WKU scored twice in the ninth when Armstrong singled to lead off and Matt Ransdell followed with a double down the leftfield line. Doug Birkofer overran the ball down the line, allowing Armstrong to score, and Grogan's groundout plated Ransdell to cut the Blue Raiders lead to one again. But Woodward got a groundout and a strikeout to end the contest and get Middle Tennessee its first series victory of the season. WKU starter Kenny Griffin lasted just three innings, giving up five runs on seven hits with a strikeout. Faircloth gave up two runs on four hits in three-plus innings, walking one and striking out three. Middle Tennessee hosts Memphis Tuesday at 7 p.m. and Wednesday at 3 p.m. at Reese Smith Field, the start of a season-high six-game homestand.

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