Big Inning Propels Raiders to Game One Victory

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JONESBORO, Ark. - Middle Tennessee broke open a tie game with a five-run sixth inning and added four insurance runs in the ninth, taking a 12-6 victory in game one of a doubleheader Saturday afternoon at Tomlinson Stadium.

The Blue Raiders scored five times on five hits in the sixth inning, breaking a 1-1 tie. Jeff Beachum drove in a run with a double, and Nathan Hines, Adam Warren and Josh Archer all drove in a run in the inning for a 6-1 advantage.

The Indians cut the lead to 8-6 with three runs in the seventh and two in the eighth, but a four-run ninth provided insurance for Middle Tennessee in the game one victory. Nate Jaggers belted a two-run homer in the inning, and Hines and Doug Birkofer both provided RBIs.

Matt Scott (6-1) worked 6.2 innings, allowing four runs on six hits with three strikeouts, to get the victory. Eric Blevins struggled through all three innings in which he worked, giving up two runs on three hits, but earned his first save of the season.

ASU starter Taylor Fowler (5-6) took the loss, allowing eight runs, six earned, on 10 hits in seven innings. The Blue Raiders scored four times in the ninth against reliever Michael Williams.

Eric McNamee and Jaggers both walked in the first before a Michael McKenry RBI single for a 1-0 lead. A walk to Beachum loaded the bases, but Hines grounded into a doubleplay to end the inning with the Blue Raiders scoring just once despite three free passes.

The Indians tied the contest in the bottom of the inning after a one-out walk to Brett Kinning and a stolen base. Geoff Desmond singled with two outs to left, plating Kinning for a 1-1 tie.

Archer belted a ball deep to leftfield in the second, but ASU's Kevin Kull climbed the wall to rob the senior of at least a double and maybe a home run.

Neither team put together a scoring chance until the Blue Raiders mounted a rally in the sixth.

Todd Martin singled to right before an infield single behind second base from Jaggers. After a strikeout Beachum laced a double down the rightfield line, scoring Martin. Hines then grounded to second for an RBI, but the freshman beat the throw after a bobble by ASU's Kinning.

A stolen base from Hines put runners at second and third for Warren, who beat out an infield chopper over the mound for another run. Hines scored on a bad pickoff throw and Warren came home on a single to center from Archer for a 6-1 Middle Tennessee lead.

The Blue Raiders added two more runs in the seventh when Jaggers drew a two-out walk and McKenry singled to left. Beachum then lined his second straight double down the leftfield line, scoring both runners for an 8-1 advantage.

But the Indians would not go away, scoring three times in the bottom of the seventh to chase Scott.

Everything started with a two-out hit batter, followed by an RBI double to leftcenter from Elliot Jacobs. Kull's blooper to short center scored another run. Kull went to second on the throw to the plate and scored on Mike Sirianni's single to right, cutting the Blue Raider lead to 8-4.

ASU made it a little closer in the eighth when Kinning drew a leadoff walk and Chris Rich belted a towering homer to left, his fifth of the season, cutting the deficit to 8-6. The Indians got a single from Hudson Smart and a two-walk by Kull before Blevins worked out of the jam, inducing a come-backer from Mike Sirianni to end the threat.

The Blue Raiders finally got some insurance in the top of the ninth, thanks to a leadoff walk by Martin before Jaggers belted a two-run homer to left, his 11th of the season.

McKenry followed with a double, went to third on a sacrifice bunt from Beachum, and scored on a double to leftcenter from Hines. A walk and an error loaded the bases for Birkofer, who executed the suicide squeeze to perfection, laying down the bunt to score Hines for the final run of the contest for the Blue Raiders.

ASU got two runners on in the ninth before Blevins got the final two outs to preserve the win for Scott.

McKenry had three of Middle Tennessee's 13 hits, with Jaggers, Hines and Beachum both collecting two hits each. Beachum drove in three runs and Jaggers scored three times in the victory.

GAME NOTES

The doubleheader is the first for the Blue Raiders since March 6, 2004, at Southeastern Louisiana and the first Sun Belt twinbill since May 4, 2002, also against Arkansas State ... Adam Warren returned to the lineup for the first time since April 19 against Memphis ... Michael McKenry extended his hitting streak to five games with an RBI single in the first ... Nate Jaggers extended his hitting streak to eight games with an infield single in the sixth ... Jeff Beachum extended his hitting streak to eight games with a double in the sixth ... McKenry tied his career-high with three hits in the game, set earlier this season against Tennessee Tech ... Eric Blevins came to record his first save of the season and second career save.

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