Blue Raiders Blast MSU, 15-2

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Middle Tennessee erupted for nine runs in the fifth inning, including two of Nathan Hines four hits in the game, and Michael McKenry added three hits, as the Blue Raiders defeated Missouri State, 15-2, Saturday afternoon at Reese Smith Field. Middle Tennessee (4-2) evened the series at one with the finale Sunday at 1 p.m. at Reese Smith Field. Missouri State's Matt Lawson hit a solo homer in the first, but an RBI double from Hines and a run-scoring single by McKenry in the bottom of the first gave the Blue Raiders a 2-1 lead until the nine-run fifth inning. In the fifth Middle Tennessee sent 15 batters to the plate and scored all nine runs after there were two outs in the inning. Seven different Blue Raiders drove in runs in the inning, breaking open the game and ending a four-game losing streak to the Bears dating to last season. Middle Tennessee added two runs in both the sixth and seventh innings, including a pinch-hit two-run homer from junior Grant Nickell in his first collegiate at-bat. Hines was 4-for-6 with three RBIs and three runs scored, while McKenry added three hits and three RBIs as well. Chase Eakes and Josh Horn also had a pair of hits in the victory. Middle Tennessee starter Tyler Copeland (2-0) allowed two runs on five hits, striking out three and walking two to pick up the victory. Brett Reilley worked the final three innings for his first save of the year, allowing just one hit and striking out four. MSU (3-3) starter Scott Carroll (1-1) pitched well for four innings but ran into lots of trouble in the fifth inning when the Blue Raiders scored nine times. Carroll gave up 10 runs on 10 hits in 4.2 innings of work, walking four and striking out three to take the loss. The Bears got on the board first with a Lawson solo homer, his first of the season. But the Blue Raiders came back with three hits in their half of the first, starting with a leadoff

single from Jeff Beachum. Hines then ripped a double over the rightfielder's head, scoring Beachum. Hines moved to third when the second baseman's throw toward third went wild. A walk to Wayne Kendrick put runners on the corners and McKenry singled sharply to right, plating Hines for a 2-1 Middle Tennessee advantage. But Carroll worked his way out of the jam without any further damage, getting a groundout, a strikeout and a popout to end the inning. Neither team threatened until the Blue Raiders were able to push across nine runs in the fifth, chasing Carroll from the game. Hines blooped a single into short leftfield with one out and Kendrick followed with a single to right. With two outs Adam Warren walked to load the bases before Todd Martin's roller was just inside the bag and off the first baseman's glove, scoring a pair. With runners on the corners, Martin broke for second and Eakes fisted a perfect hit-and-run single into just the right spot, plating Warren for a 5-1 lead. Rawley Bishop then blooped a single between the mound and second base that fell for a hit, scoring another run, and Horn's single to the rightside scored another run for a 7-1 advantage. Hines singled home a run later in the inning and Kendrick's bases-loaded walk forced in a run. McKenry's two-run single to center ended the nine-run inning for an 11-1 Blue Raiders lead. In the seventh Eakes singled up the middle to leadoff and Horn laced a double down the rightfield line, plating pinch-runner Doug Birkofer from first. Hines' third RBI of the day scored pinch-runner Myles Ervin for a 13-2 advantage. Warren singled to leadoff the seventh and with two outs, pinch-hitter Nickell belted a home run to leftcenter in his first career at-bat, giving Middle Tennessee a 15-2 edge.

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