

Blue Raiders Fall at UNO, 13-6

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NEW ORLEANS, La. - New Orleans scored eight times in the final two innings, including a pair of home run from Michael Epping, defeating Middle Tennessee, 13-6, Sunday afternoon and winning the series at Maestri Field.

The Privateers (17-17, 4-5 Sun Belt) took an early lead, going ahead 1-0, 4-1 and 5-4, only to watch Middle Tennessee tie the game and then take the lead at 6-5. But UNO exploded for five runs in the seventh, with Epping's grand slam highlighting the frame. The home team then scored three more times in the eighth, including a two-run homer from Epping.

Adam Campbell (1-2), the third of four UNO hurlers, picked up the victory, tossing two scoreless innings, giving up

two hits and striking out two. Privateers starter Brandon Johnson allowed four runs in 4.2 innings and walked six. The righthander found a groove until turning his ankle on a pitch in the fifth.

Middle Tennessee starter Brett Reilley lasted just three-plus innings, giving up four runs, two earned, on four hits with four walks. Brett Smalley (1-1) suffered the loss, throwing 3.1 innings. The righthander ran into trouble in the seventh after a walk and a pair of bunts loaded the bases for UNO.

Tommy Sterritt gave up the grand slam to Epping and Langdon Stanley allowed the three runs in the eighth.

Michael McKenry homered and scored twice for the Blue Raiders (13-13, 3-3), while Chase Eakes tied his career-high with three hits and Josh Horn added a pair. Middle Tennessee did not help themselves in the contest, allowing eight walks, hitting two batters and making four errors as well as stranding 13 runners.



New Orleans got on the board with a run in the first when Brandon Bowser was hit with one out and Epping reached on a throwing error by Reilley. With two outs Greg Wolfe and Mike Constantino both walked, forcing in a run.

The Blue Raiders missed chances to score in the first and second innings, leaving a pair of runners in both frames. But McKenry put Middle Tennessee on the board with a solo home run to rightfield in the third, his third straight game with a round-tripper and seventh of the season.

But the lead was short-lived, as the Privateers plated three runs in the bottom of the inning with just two hits and another error. Constantino walked with one out and Alex Webster was hit. T.J. Baxter's single to leftcenter scored a run and David Broussard's nice bunt between the mound and first base plated another.

Jason Schwab then reached on an error, loading the bases, and Bowser's sacrifice fly to rightfield scored Baxter for a 4-1 UNO lead.

The Blue Raiders tied the game in the fifth, with Wayne Kendrick starting the rally with a two-out single. UNO's Johnson turned his ankle during Kendrick's at-bat and did not look the same afterward.

Todd Martin then walked, as did McKenry. On a full count pitch with the runners going, Adam Warren lined a single into leftcenter and the runners never stopped, with all three scoring on the play to knot the contest at four. The Blue Raiders could have had more, but on Horn's single up the middle, UNO second baseman Johnny Giovatella made a diving stop. Warren made a big turn around third and was caught in a rundown to end the inning.

The Privateers pushed across a run without a hit in the bottom of the inning, though, starting with a one-out walk to Baxter, who then stole second. An error moved the runner to third and Baxter scored on Schwab's bunt.

But Middle Tennessee came right back with two runs in the sixth on four hits. Alex Watson and Eakes both singled to leadoff and Jeff Beachum's sacrifice was in a perfect place and all three runners were safe on the play.

After a fielder's choice, Martin singled through the leftside, plating a pair of runs, giving Middle Tennessee its first lead of the game at 6-5.

UNO regained the lead in the seventh when the Blue Raiders ran into some tough luck. Webster walked to leadoff and Horn fielded Baxter's bunt but slipped down, with Baxter beating the throw. Broussard then bunted and Smalley's throw to third was late, loading the bases. After a flyout, Bowser lined off Smalley's glove, scoring a run.

Epping then lifted a high fly ball against Sterritt over the rightfield wall for a grand slam and a 10-6 Privateers advantage.

UNO added three more runs in the eighth on a pair of doubles from Baxter and Schwab and Epping's second homer in two innings, this one a two-run shot.

McKenry was 8-for-13 with two doubles, three home runs, six runs scored and six RBIs in the series,

while Eakes went 5-for-7 with a run scored.

Middle Tennessee begins a six-game homestand Tuesday with a 7 p.m. contest against Austin Peay. The Blue Raiders host Belmont on Wednesday, Western Kentucky in a three-game series next weekend and then Vanderbilt on April 18, all at Reese Smith Field.

GAME NOTES

Michael McKenry got the start in rightfield, his fourth career start in the outfield and first since April 10-11, 2004, at Florida International ... Michael McKenry extended his hitting streak to seven games with a solo home run in the third ... Wayne Kendrick extended his hitting streak to a team-best eight games with a single in the fifth ... Josh Horn extended his hitting to five games with a single in the fifth ... Jeff Beachum extended his hitting streak to four games with a single in the sixth.

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