

# Blue Raider rally falls short to Portland, 6-5

## Skinner homers in season opener

February 18, 2011 · Athletic Communications

### **MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -**

Middle Tennessee overcame an early three-run deficit, but couldn't muster a second comeback in the bottom of the ninth, falling to visiting Portland 6-5 at Reese Smith Jr. Field on Friday evening.

"As the game wore on, I was beginning to think that momentum was on our side, but that's baseball," head coach Steve Peterson said.

"This is just one of 56 games. This team will lose some games and win some games this year. We just have to keep plugging along." Murfreesboro native Will Skinner didn't show much rust for the opening game of the season, going 2-4 at the plate including a lead-off home run to left field in the bottom of the ninth to cut the deficit to one. "I think that ball would've left Yellowstone," Peterson said. "I think it's clear that Will has become a better hitter, a better outfielder and just a better player since last season. He's learned a bit

more about the game, and I think he can be a real leader on this team." Tyler Acker notched three hits in five at bats with a pair of runs batted in, and Matthew Drake went 2-4 in his MT debut after transferring from Wallace-Hanceville Community College. Jay Morris, a transfer from former Sun Belt member New Orleans, was the only other Blue Raider with multiple hits, going 2-5. Justin Guidry tripled and scored two runs. Hank LaRue and Ryan Stephens both singled in their collegiate debut, but the Blue Raiders were out-hit 14-12 on the day. On the mound, Eric Gilley gave up seven hits, three runs and a pair of walks before leaving after the fourth inning. Jud Stoltz entered in his stead, and after surrendering a run in the fifth, the senior settled down and didn't allow another run over three innings of relief. Keaton Baker made his collegiate debut and pitched a scoreless eighth before



allowing two runs in the top of the ninth, picking up the loss. Portland grabbed an early lead, picking up a run in each the first, third and fourth innings to go up 3-0. Middle Tennessee (0-1) plated their first run of the season in the bottom of the fourth frame. Acker reached base on a single through the the left side, and advanced to third on a Drake double before scoring on a Stephens fly ball to center. The Blue Raiders cut the deficit to one thanks to some Acker heroics an inning later. Coming to the plate with the bases loaded, the senior catcher put a single just over the the reach second baseman to plate Guidry and Skinner and bring the score to 4-3 after five. Middle Tennessee evened things up in the seventh with some timely hitting. Guidry led off with a walk, but was still on first after a pair of MT fly ball outs. However, back-to-back singles from Acker and Drake brought him home. Portland scored twice in the top of the ninth and handed the game over to Preseason All-America closer Chris Dennis. Skinner began a Blue Raider comeback bid with a leadoff homer, but MT couldn't find the equalizing run. Middle Tennessee will play the second game of the series tomorrow afternoon at Reese Smith Jr. Field. Hunter Adkins is slated to take the mound, and first pitch is set for 2 PM.

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*Printed on July 22, 2014*

*Original URL: <http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/51291>*