Baseball rallies but falls just short 5-4 to rival Hilltoppers

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - Middle Tennessee mounted a ninth inning rally on Sunday afternoon at Western Kentucky but came up just short falling 5-4. The Blue Raiders (5-13, 0-3) had quality at bats in the ninth when they needed it. Freshman Ryan Stephens doubled to deep right centerfield to bring in senior Tyler Acker from second. Then a ground ball by sophomore Johnny Thomas scored r-sophomore Robert Lawrence from third and put the Blue Raiders within two. Freshman Hank LaRue made it a one-run game with his sacrifice fly to centerfield, 5-4 but the rally ended there as junior Justin Guidry struck out looking. Stephens led all hitters for Middle Tennessee as he went 3 for 4 with a double, RBI and scored two runs. LaRue and Guidry each ended the day with two hits as the team had 11 total. The Blue Raiders left eight runners on base in the game including three in scoring position. "We made a run on a day when the wind was blowing in hard from right field. We had some opportunity to score more runs but we just couldn't get that hit. I really like what we did defensively and played solid defense behind our pitchers," head coach Steve Peterson said. Senior Eric Gilley took the loss on the mound after allowing two runs on three hits in 5.1 innings of work. The Hilltoppers (13-6, 3-0) scored all of their runs in the sixth inning as Middle Tennessee used four pitchers in the inning. "Gilley had some good stuff but he walked six, hit another and you just knew it was all going to catch up on him. I was hoping to get him through the sixth, get an inning out of someone and then go to Mittura. Obviously it didn't work that way. Gilley had them handcuffed pretty well as much as his lack of command and kept getting out of jams but it caught up to him," Peterson said. R-Freshman Paul Mittura closed the game out for Middle Tennessee allowing no runs and just two hits in 2.1 innings of work. Western Kentucky had eight hits on the day, half of which were for extra bases, with Ivan Hartle leading the way. Hartle had two doubles, three hits and three RBI to guide the offense. The real key for the Hilltoppers after they had the lead was pitching. Brian Edelen took the win as he allowed just one run on six hits in six innings of work. Rye Davis picked up his third save of the season after allowing three runs on five hits in three innings of work. With runners at

first and second, LaRue singled to right field allowing the runners to advance. Then the right fielder overthrew home to try and keep the lead runner, Stephens, from scoring as the Blue Raiders took a 1-0 lead in the fifth. The Hilltoppers knotted the score at 1 in the sixth after a double to deep centerfield by Hutchison scored Robbins, who walked, from first. Then Huck doubled to the left field corner allowing Hutchison to score from third and break the tie, 2-1. Back-to-back hits by Western Kentucky scored three more runs giving them a four-run lead, 5-1. It is the first Sun Belt away conference series the Blue Raiders have been swept in since April 30-May 2 at UL-Lafayette. The Blue Raiders will be back in action Friday, March 25 through Sunday, March 27 when it travels to Boca Raton, Fla., for a three-game Sun Belt Conference series with Florida Atlantic.

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