

Baseball heads south for series with Florida Atlantic

Young players help guide team

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee will look to rebound from its opening Sun Belt Conference series when it travels to Boca Raton, Fla., for a three-game weekend series. The Blue Raiders (5-13, 0-3) struggled with hitting and pitching throughout the series with Western Kentucky never getting them on the same page at the same time. The defense was solid however recording 72 putouts with just two errors with sophomore Johnny Thomas notching six putouts and five assists with no errors. Thomas split time at second base and shortstop during the series with Western Kentucky. Sophomore Daniel Palo got into trouble early in the game Friday night but settled down working six innings allowing 10 hits, two of which were for extra bases. Palo will receive the start on the mound on Friday against Florida Atlantic. R-freshman Paul Mittura performed well for the Blue Raiders on Sunday at Western Kentucky and has



become one of the most consistent relievers. This season, Mittura has 11 strikeouts in 17 innings of work with a 1-1 record, two saves and a 2.65 earned-run-average. Freshman Ryan Stephens found his stride at the plate last week recording a career high three hits at Western Kentucky on Sunday. The Murfreesboro, Tenn., native ended the week batting .353 with six hits, a double, five RBI and scored three runs. Young players have played a large role this season with as many as five freshmen and sophomores in the starting lineup at one time. Starting at third base every game this

season, freshman Hank LaRue has been a solid defender and aided his team at the plate. Last week, LaRue led the team at the plate batting .368 with seven hits, two RBI and scored two runs. The Blue Raiders will need all of these players in addition to upperclassmen seniors Tyler Acker and Will Skinner and junior Justin Guidry to perform well against Florida Atlantic this weekend. Acker and Skinner lead the team in average on the season and have 28 RBI and scored 29 runs between them. Florida Atlantic is 13-8 on the season and won its opening conference series 2-1 against Florida International. The Owls are batting .297 as a team with Alex Hudak leading the way with a .417 average. Nick Delguidice is leading the team in RBI with 17 while Raymond Church has scored a team high 21 runs. In FAU's opening Sun Belt series, Hudak batted .600 with six hits and three RBI. Church batted .500 with seven hits while Dan Scheffler had a team high six RBI with five hits and two home runs. The pitching staff has also performed well for the Owls as it has a 4.69 earned-run-average with 130 strikeouts in 188 innings of work. Paul Davis leads the squad with a 1.64 ERA, 4-0 record and 25 strikeouts in 33 innings of work. Middle Tennessee leads the all-time series 10-7. Head coach Steve Peterson is 10-7 against the Owls. The Blue Raiders won the series 2-1 last season and are 7-1 in the last eight meetings between the two schools. Friday's game is set to begin at 5:30 p.m. CDT at FAU Stadium. Dick Palmer will have the call on the Blue Raider Network. Live stats will be available through goblueraiders.com. Saturday, March 26, the first pitch is set for 3 p.m. CDT while Sunday's game will be an early start, 11 a.m. CDT, to accommodate the Blue Raiders' travel plans back to Murfreesboro.

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