Blue Raiders explode for 18 runs to take series win

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MIAMI - Middle Tennessee turned up the offensive heat in south Florida Saturday afternoon, tying its season high for runs as it overwhelmed Florida International 18-1 to claim the Sun Belt Conference series win at University Park. The Blue Raiders (24-17, 9-7) moved into fourth place in the SBC race and remain in the thick of the league chase for the championship heading into the stretch run with the teams ahead of them looming on the schedule. Middle Tennessee has scored 28 runs in the first two games of the series, while allowing just five, and it represents the most runs the Blue Raiders have scored in an entire series against Florida International (28-20, 7-9) since joining the Sun Belt in 2001. Junior southpaw Tyler Copeland continued his strong campaign with eight sterling innings, striking out four and walking just one to improve to 6-2. While the offense has left plenty margin for error, Middle Tennessee's pitching staff has not needed the cushion in this series, allowing just two free passes in 18 innings of work. However, the story Saturday was the offensive avalanche as the Blue Raiders pounded out 19 hits, including five home runs and three doubles. Todd Martin connected for his team-leading 13th home run of the season - and second in as many games - just after catcher Michael McKenry had belted his 12th round-tripper of the season to briefly tie Martin for the team lead. Marcus Taylor also connected for his second home run in as many games with his eighth of the season. Jeff Beachum and Rawley Bishop each hit their second home run of the campaign. Bishop, Matt Campbell and Doug Birkofer also added doubles in the offensive uprising that saw Middle Tennessee break the game open early with three in the second and fourth in the third to take a 7-1 lead. Any lingering hopes of a Florida International comeback were totally dashed when Middle Tennessee opened up for three in the sixth and put the exclamation mark on the rousing win with a six-run seventh. Seven Blue Raiders had multi-hit games, led by Josh Horn's 3-for-6 performance. Beachum (2-for-5, 3 RBI), McKenry (2-for-4, 2 RBI), Martin (2-for-5, 3 RBI), Alex Watson (2-for-2, 2 RBI), and Bishop (2-for-2, 4 RBI) also had multiple hits. Nathan Hines was 1-for-3 to extend his hitting streak to a career-high 13 games. Middle Tennessee will go for the series

sweep Sunday at noon as Brett Smalley (1-1, 5.96) takes the mound.

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