

SBC Surprise: Blue Raiders continue run by knocking off Ragin' Cajuns

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. -

Middle Tennessee's magic in the Sun Belt Conference Championships continued here Thursday afternoon as the Blue Raiders used strong starting pitching, solid relief work and timely hitting to turn back second-seeded Louisiana-Lafayette, 5-2, in the winner's bracket semifinals.

- **Photos:** [MT vs. ULL Gallery](#)

The win, which comes on the heels of Middle Tennessee upsetting South Alabama in the opener on Wednesday, moves the Blue Raiders (29-24) into Friday's winner's bracket finals against either South Alabama or Louisiana-Lafayette at 4 p.m. A Middle Tennessee win would put the Blue Raiders in the SBC Championship game for the fourth straight

season and fifth time in six years since joining the league in 2001.

"I told our team coming into this tournament that we needed to upset some teams in order to advance because no one was expecting us to win," Middle Tennessee coach Steve Peterson said. "We got our first upset against South Alabama Wednesday and we got another one today. Now we need to get another upset on Friday. I'm proud of my ball club. The guys have played well and they have competed a very high level."



In regard to seeding, Middle Tennessee's win against the Ragin' Cajuns (38-19) would be considered an upset; however, championship history in the Sun Belt would suggest otherwise as the Blue Raiders now own a 6-1 record against Louisiana-Lafayette in the SBC Championships.

"We've had some great battles with Louisiana-Lafayette the past few years and this was another one," Peterson said. "That's a first-class ball club and it was a great game."

While Middle Tennessee celebrated another tournament win against the Cajuns it was not without loss. Blue Raider outfielder Adam Warren went crashing into the outfield fence trying to race down a foul ball in the top of the ninth inning. Warren suffered a cut to his jaw and was taken to a local hospital for evaluation.

One inning earlier, Warren made a potential game-saving grab when he made a superb over-the-shoulder catch with two runners on and two outs in a 5-1 game, but Middle Tennessee's defense was flawless as it supported lefty Tyler Copeland with strong play throughout.

Copeland (7-4) worked into the eighth inning, scattering five hits and allowing just one run before giving way to the bullpen. Jeff Kasser, Josh Anderson and Brett Reilley combined for the final two innings to nail down the win with Reilley earning his second save. Anderson worked 1-1/3 innings of no-hit relief before Reilley was called on with runners on the corners and two outs and the game hanging in the balance. He delivered by betting a ground ball to Wayne Kendrick to end the game.

Offensively, Matt Campbell was the big hero, coming through with a two-run home run to cap a three-run fourth inning that staked Middle Tennessee to a 4-1 advantage. The Blue Raiders tied the game 1-1 in the bottom of the third when Josh Horn doubled and eventually scored on Kendrick's sacrifice fly. Jeff Beachum's milestone single helped set up the first score.

Beachum tied the Sun Belt's career hits record when he singled into left field with no one out in the bottom of the third for his 318th career knock, tying Jacksonville University's Ernie Carr (1985-88) for the all-time mark. Ittingly, Beachum's milestone hit also factored into Middle Tennessee scoring its first run of the game to tie the score, 1-1, in the bottom of the third as it followed Horn's double to put runners on the corners.

The Blue Raiders had their one big inning in the fourth when they scored three. Chase Eakes gave Middle Tennessee the lead with a perfectly-executed squeeze play that scored Michael McKenry, and Campbell followed with a two-run jolt to left center - his fourth of the season, to give the Blue Raiders a 4-1 cushion.

Middle Tennessee added a big insurance run in the seventh and held on for the win. Todd Martin and Horn each had two hits for the Blue Raiders to lead the offensive charge.