Blue Raiders post thrilling 15-9 victory over ULM

Acker key in pair of game-changing rallies

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - The Middle Tennessee baseball team posted two big innings en route to a 15-9 victory over visiting ULM at Reese Smith Jr. Field on Friday night, and Tyler Acker played a huge role in both of them, leading the Blue Raiders to their third consecutive conference win. "What a ball game," head coach Steve Peterson said. "It was a great comeback by Monroe, but even a better comeback by the Blue Raiders. I'm very proud of the way my team battled tonight, and I've been preaching to the guys that we have to take it one game at a time." With the Blue Raiders (14-25, 6-10 SBC) down three in the bottom of the fifth, Acker delivered with a base-clearing double to tie the game up and kick start a seven-run inning for Middle Tennessee. The senior made his mark at the plate again just a few innings later. After ULM (19-18, 5-11 SBC) tied things back up in the eighth, Acker laced a single to left center to bring home the eventual winning run. The Nashville native finished 2-for-5 at the plate with four runs batted in, two runs scored and defensively caught two runners attempting to steal. "Coach has asked us all year not to quit, and this is a great example of that," Acker said. "We just battled and battled, and we're fighting to get into the conference tournament just like ULM is. We just need to keep fighting and not give up. I think we did that tonight." Acker wasn't the only offensive force for the Blue Raiders. Fellow senior Will Skinner went three-for-five with three runs scored, four RBI, and knocked out his 10th homer of the season in the seventh. Justin Guidry also had a three-hit day with three runs scored, and Ryan Stephens was 2-for-3 with a pair of runs. Hank LaRue hit his second

home run of the year with a three-run towering shot off the top of the scoreboard in right field in the eighth inning. The freshman finished 1-for-5 with three RBI and a run scored. The Blue Raiders outhit the Warhawks 15-14, and the 15 runs marked a season high. On the mound, Daniel Palo overcame some early adversity and pitched seven innings with six strikeouts. The sophomore allowed four runs through the first two innings, but didn't give up another earned run over the ensuing five. Jud Stoltz came on in relief and allowed three runs, all earned. Paul Mittura recorded the final five outs and allowed one run (unearned) for his second victory of the season. After ULM grabbed an early four-run lead, the Blue Raiders mounted their comeback in the fifth. Middle Tennessee sent nine batters to the plate before recording the first out of the frame. Following Acker's game-tying double, back-to-back doubles by Skinner and Guidry handed the Blue Raiders their first lead. Both Skinner and Guidry ultimately scored to hand MT a 7-4 advantage after five. Guidry and Skinner teamed up again in the seventh. After Guidry reached base with a single, Skinner followed up with a two-run shot to right center. However, the Warhawks put together a comeback of their own in the eighth, scoring four times and tying things up at 9-9. The deadlock was short-lived, as Middle Tennessee responded with six runs in the bottom of the frame. Ryan Stephens led off with a single, and advanced to second on a Ryan Ford sacrifice bunt. Back-to-back singles by Johnny Thomas and Acker brought-home the go-ahead run for Middle Tennessee, and LaRue secured the victory later in the inning with the three-run blast. Middle Tennessee will play the second game of the series on Saturday night at 6 p.m. at Reese Smith Jr. Field. Reigning Sun Belt Pitcher of the Week Hunter Adkins is slated to start, and the game will be televised regionally on Comcast Sports South.

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