

Raiders Make Fourth Straight Championship Game

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BOWLING GREEN, Ky. -

Senior Jeff Beachum was 4-for-4 and reached base six times, scoring four runs and leading Middle Tennessee to a 14-7 victory over Louisiana-Lafayette Friday at Nick Denes Field in the Aeropostale Sun Belt Championships. The Blue Raiders will play in the tournament championship game on Saturday against either Troy at Noon.

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

Beachum was just one of the bright spots for Middle Tennessee, who reached the SBC Tournament title contest for the fourth straight year and fifth time in six seasons since joining the league.

The Blue Raiders pounded out 19 hits in the contest, answering each time the Ragin' Cajuns scored to take the lead in the first five innings. Beachum added three RBIs and a solo home run, while Michael McKenry drove in three runs, Nathan Hines and Wayne Kendrick both recorded three hits and four players scored twice.

The game was a seesaw affair until the final two innings when Middle Tennessee added six runs for the final tally.

"Whenever a team scores, the one thing you do not want to do is put up a zero. That was our goal - to get something back everything [Louisiana-Lafayette] scored and we did that," Beachum said. "We didn't strikeout much, just battling and putting the ball in play."



Tommy Sterritt (2-2) worked 1.2 innings for the win and Shay Horseman posted his first career save with 2.2 hitless frames, striking out one. Nick Marrs started and tossed 4.2 innings, giving up four earned runs on seven hits.

Brandt Sanders (0-4), the second of six UL pitchers, suffered the loss, allowing five runs on six hits in 2.2 innings.

"In the history of the series [with Louisiana-Lafayette], it's always a war with both teams getting after it," head coach Steve Peterson said. "It's a love-hate relationship, with guys competing. They bring out the best in us and I think we do the same with them. We beat an outstanding baseball team."

Peterson said the middle of the Cajuns order hurt the Blue Raiders, combining for seven of the team's nine hits with four home runs and five RBIs. But Peterson was able to get innings late in the game from Horseman to push the Blue Raiders into another conference tournament championship contest.

"It gets down to execution and we didn't do a real good job of that in the middle of their order. But I held Horseman back with the idea we would be playing Louisiana-Lafayette again and he made me look good."

Middle Tennessee had a chance to take an early lead when Beachum walked to lead off the game and Kendrick followed with a double. Todd Martin chopped a ball to Jefferies Tatford at first and his throw to the plate nailed Beachum. McKenry then laced a ball to second base, but it started an inning-ending 4-6-3 doubleplay.

The Cajuns were first on the scoreboard when Devery Van De Keere lifted a high fly ball to right that just cleared the wall with two outs in the first for his ninth home run of the season.

The Blue Raiders tied the contest in the second after a leadoff double from Hines. He moved to third on a groundout by Matt Campbell and scored a sacrifice fly off the bat of Marcus Taylor.

UL retook the lead in the bottom of the inning after Scott Hawkins was hit with one out. Campbell made a diving play on a ball hit by Josh Landry, but the throw went right by Beachum and into leftfield, putting runners on the corners. Hawkins scored on a fielder's choice by Alex Preciado for a 2-1 Ragin' Cajuns advantage.

Middle Tennessee went back ahead in the third, with the rally starting after Beachum was hit with one out. Kendrick singled to right, moving Beachum to third, and the runner scored on a wild pitch. Martin's double down the rightfield line plated Kendrick for a 3-2 advantage.

Marrs ran out of gas after getting the first two outs in the fifth. Van De Keere singled to leftcenter before an RBI double to rightcenter from Jonathan Lucroy. Marrs fell behind 2-0 to Tatford before the UL first baseman hammered a pitch over the rightfield wall for a 5-4 Cajuns lead.

But Middle Tennessee responded in the back-and-forth affair with four runs of its own in the sixth, sending 10 batters to the plate and taking advantage of one big error.

Hines and Campbell both singled to leadoff and Taylor put down a bunt. Sanders threw to third, but the ball was well wide of the bag, allowing both runners to score on the play. With Taylor on second, Josh Horn chopped a ball up the middle. Cajun shortstop Jameson Parker double-clutched with Taylor standing on the bag and Horn beat the throw.

Beachum's single plated a run and Horn later scored on a passed ball for an 8-5 Middle Tennessee lead.

Sterritt breezed through five outs before giving up back-to-back solo homers in the seventh to Lucroy and Tatford, cutting the lead to one.

But Middle Tennessee answered with two more runs in the eighth amidst a controversial call at second base.

Beachum led off with a single and Kendrick bounced a ball up the middle to Parker, who looked to step on the bag and finish the doubleplay. But Beachum was called safe on the play and UL head coach Tony Robichaux came out to argue. At the end of the argument UL assistant coach John Szefc was thrown out from the dugout, adding fuel to the already intense game.

After a Martin walk McKenry bounced a single through the leftside for an RBI, and Hines executed the hit-and-run, also finding a hole on the leftside, for another run and a 10-7 advantage.

The Blue Raiders added four insurance runs in the ninth, starting with a one-out double from Horn. Beachum's chopper over a drawn-in infield scored the run and Kendrick followed with an RBI triple. After Martin's third walk of the contest, McKenry doubled off the centerfield wall, scoring a pair of runs for a 14-7 Middle Tennessee lead.

Middle Tennessee improved to 7-1 against Louisiana-Lafayette in the SBC Championships in the last four seasons, eliminating UL all four years and giving the Cajuns both losses in the tourney in 2003, 2004 and 2006.

The championship scenario is as follows: If Troy wins late Friday night, there is a one-game championship at Noon Saturday. If Florida International wins, Troy and FIU play again at Noon Saturday with the championship game to follow 45 minutes after the conclusion of the first game.

Stay tuned to GoBlueRaiders.com for exact game times for championship Saturday.

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