

Softball earns post-season bid

Team knocks off rival at home

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. -

Middle Tennessee softball clinched a berth in the 2011 Sun Belt Conference post-season tournament on Wednesday as they defeated rival Western Kentucky 3-2 at Blue Raider Field.

It was a tightly contested affair from the very beginning as both squads fought hard for a victory that would send one team to the playoff tournament. In the win, the Blue Raiders advance to 18-29 on the season, including an 8-14 mark in the league. This tops the team's conference mark of 7-17 from a season ago.

MT wasted no time, tallying hits on their first three at bats

of the game as Nina Davenport, Brittney Banania and Kayla Toney all singled. Banania earned her ninth RBI of season, driving in Davenport on the inning. Corrie Abel added the second run of the side on a sacrifice fly, bringing home Banania. Abel has 27 RBIs on the year, the most of her career in a single-season.

Western Kentucky attempted to mount a rally in the fourth, scoring one run off three hits. With one runner on first and the score at 2-1, WKU's Amanda Walden threatened to tie the game when she doubled on a misplayed ball to right. The Hilltopper base runner made an effort to come all the way around from to score. However the alert Raiders were able to get the out at home, with Abel, Kelsey Dortch and Kaycee Popham getting assists on Natalie Ysais' putout. MT led 2-1 after four.

The Hilltoppers refused to go quietly as they later knotted the game at two in the sixth on a solo-shot home run..

However, the day belonged to the Blue Raiders. In the bottom half of the sixth, MT loaded the bases with two outs as Davenport singled, before Toney and Abel each worked walks. With Nina Dever at



the plate, WKU pitcher Mallorie Sulaski threw a wild pitch. The eager Davenport sprung from third, scoring the go ahead to retake the lead 3-2.

"I was ready at third, hoping Dever got a hit," said Davenport. "When it bounced off the catcher's glove I just went as hard as I could to get the run."

MT pitcher Janele Robinson closed the door in the seventh, recording three successive outs to earn her sixth win of the year. Robinson went the distance, allowing just one earned run off five hits. The Toledo, Ill., native is throwing the best stuff of her career as she has a 4-3 record with a 2.50 ERA in her last seven starts. She has a strikeout to walk ratio of 23/11 over the span.

"It feels great to get the win," said Robinson. "We have been playing good and we have to continue to play well."

The Blue Raider victory gives the team a 14-7 record at Blue Raider Field in 2011. This is the program's best home record since 2001, when the squad went 17-6.

Middle Tennessee softball will conclude their 2011 regular-season campaign Saturday as they travel Bowling Green for a doubleheader finale with the Hilltoppers. Live statistics and audio will be available on GoBlueRaiders.com with updates and coverage on Twitter.com/MT_Softball.

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