

# Stephens' RBI-single lifts Blue Raiders past Vols in extras

## MT hands Tennessee its first loss of season

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### KNOXVILLE, Tenn. -

Centerfielder Ryan Stephens drove in the game-winning run and Daniel Palo struck out the side in the bottom of the 10th to lift Middle Tennessee to a 5-4 extra-inning victory over the Tennessee Volunteers on Tuesday night at Lindsey Nelson Stadium. The Blue Raiders hand the Vols their first loss of the season, while MT picks up its first victory at UT since 1994. MT (5-3) has now won two of the last three meetings against the Vols (7-1). "I'm very proud of my team coming in here and getting a good quality win," head coach Steve Peterson said. "I was proud to see Ryan get that big RBI. He has been working hard."

Designated hitter Matthew Drake finished the day 2-for-3 with a pair of RBI and Stephens also drove in a pair of runs on a pair of hits.



Second baseman Johnny Thomas crossed the plate three times, including the winning run, going 2-for-5 with an RBI. The Blue Raider pitching staff was solid on the day as well, as five pitchers combined to give up just two earned runs. Knoxville native Jordan Cooper got the start and tossed 5.1 innings, allowing two runs, both earned, on seven hits. Keaton Baker tossed 2.2 hitless innings and allowed a run, while Joey McClung (1-0) scored his first victory of the season with two-thirds of an inning. Palo closed out the final frame for his first save of the year, retiring all three Vols he faced on swinging strikeouts. "I told Daniel today would be a day I would use him," Peterson said. "I didn't want him to be in that situation, but I felt like we could get the ball by them if he was in the strike zone. I was very impressed. He looked like he owned that piece of property in the middle of the infield." The Vols drew first blood, pushing a run across in the first inning on a sacrifice fly from

centerfielder Chris Fritts. UT added another run in the fourth after Fritts was his hit to lead off the inning and catcher Wes Walker singled him home for the 2-0 lead. Walker finished the day 1-for-2 with an RBI. UT threatened again in the bottom of fifth after leftfielder Chris Pierce worked his way to third on a two-out single, balk and stolen base. MT catcher Dain McNabb, though, ended the threat with a catch at the backstop to keep it a two-run game. Leftfielder Justin Guidry's one-out double got the Blue Raider offense rolling in the fifth, as MT rallied for three runs in the frame to take the lead. Following Guidry's two-bagger, Ethan Williams drew a walk before Thomas smacked a double to right field to plate Guidry. Rightfielder Trent Miller took first after getting hit, loading the bases for Drake. Drake's slow roller down the first base line allowed Williams to charge home from third, tying the game at 2-2. Stephens then drove a ball to the shortstop and beat the throw for a base-knock as Thomas crossed the plate for the go-ahead run. Drake added an insurance run in the eighth to make it a 4-2 Blue Raider lead. Thomas reached on an error by the shortstop then scored from first when Drake roped a double into the rightfield corner. A hit batsmen and walk put the tying run on in the bottom of the ninth for the Vols. Walker's sacrifice bunt advanced both runners. Down to the final out for UT, third baseman Zach Luther grounded to short and Ryan Ford made the throw to first, but Williams' glove was knocked off as he applied the tag, allowing both runners to score and tie the game at 4-4. Not to be deterred, Thomas led off the bottom of the 10th with a double to the right-center gap and moved to third on Miller's sacrifice bunt. Stephens delivered the two-out blow, ripping a single up the middle to give the Blue Raiders a 5-4 edge. Palo, in his first appearance of the season, breezed through the UT lineup in the bottom of the 10th to seal the victory. The Vols used four pitchers on the day, with Nick Williams (1-1) suffering the loss after giving up the lone run on three hits. Murfreesboro native Carter Watson started for UT and threw 4.0 innings of hitless ball. The Blue Raiders return home for the third straight weekend, hosting Louisiana Tech for a three-game series. Friday's first pitch is slated for 3 p.m. CT.

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