Stephens' home runs keys rally for Blue Raiders over Austin Peay

Bullpen, defense solid for MT in comeback victory

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Final Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Ryan Stephens' first home run of the season keyed a rally for the Middle Tennessee baseball team as the Blue Raiders topped the Austin Peay Governors, 10-7, on Wednesday night at Reese Smith Jr. Field. Stephens finished the contest 3-for-4 and was among five Blue Raiders to drive in a run. "We played unselfish baseball all around tonight," Stephens said. "(The Governors) scored five in the first inning, so we knew we had a whole ball game to get it back, and we were able to put some hits together to do it. Everyone's getting hits, everyone's getting on base and playing great defense, and that's what you have to do." Ryan Ford tallied three RBI on a 1-for-2 performance, laying down a pair of perfect squeezes to plate two runs, in addition to helping turn two of MT's three double plays in the contest. Trent Miller was 4-for-5 with two RBI and two runs, while Hank LaRue delivered a pair of RBI and runs on a 2-for-3 day at the plate. Justin Guidry rounded out the Blue Raiders who drove in a run, going 2-for-4 with a run and RBI. The Blue Raiders (22-16) had to mount a comeback after spotting the Governors (22-14) five runs in the first. Austin Peay picked up two quick outs to open the contest, but the next seven batters reached base. The Governors sandwich a pair of walks around three consecutive hits to pick up three runs, then Rolando Gautier accounted for the final two runs of the frame with a base-hit to right field before Kooper Kessler

came on in relief of Keaton Baker to pick up the final out of the inning. Kessler would go on to pitch 3.1 innings, allowing just one hit and holding the Governors at bay while the Blue Raider offense kickstarted. Stephens blasted the first pitch he saw over the rightfield wall in the third to get the MT offense rolling. Ford followed with a single to right field and made it to second on an error. Dain McNabb sacrificed Ford to third with a bunt and Guidry's sac fly provided the Blue Raiders' second run. "It was a fastball in and I was just able to get my hands to it and hit it," Stephens said of the home run. "I got a good piece of it and when that happens, the ball can go far."

The rally continued in the fourth when Ford plated a run with an RBI-groundout before MT broke through in the fifth with four more runs to take the lead. Guidry's leadoff single started the onslaught. Johnny Thomas took a walk, then Miller and LaRue produced RBI-singles to tie the game at 5-5. Stephens infield single loaded the bases and a passed ball allowed Miller to charge home for the go-ahead run. Ford then delivered his first suicide squeeze to score LaRue for the two-run cushion. The momentum carried into the seventh as the Blue Raiders picked up two more runs. LaRue's base-knock to right field drove in Miller from second, and Stephens added his third RBI with another perfectly placed squeeze bunt. While the Blue Raider offense continued to churn out hits, collecting 14 in the contest, the bullpen and defense thrived through the middle innings. Nathan Foriest (1-1) tossed two innings of three-hit relief to pick up his first win of the season. The bullpen limited the Governors to four hits and no runs from the second through the seventh thanks in part to a key double play LaRue turned after making a leaping grab with the bases loaded. "We've been hard on the bullpen, but they won the ball game for us tonight," head coach Steve Peterson said. "It's good that we had to come back, that it was a close game, and we had to shut them down in the end." The Governors managed to push three across in the eighth to make it a 9-7 contest, but Miller's RBI-single in the bottom of the frame added an insurance run for the Blue Raiders. Joey McClung retired the Governors in order in the ninth to pick up his fourth save of the season. MT hits the road for the next four games, beginning with a weekend series at ULM. First pitch is slated for 6 p.m. Friday in Monroe, La., with Hunter Adkins taking the mound for the Blue Raiders.

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