Baseball set to return to conference action

Blue Raiders hit the road for ULM

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - After dropping two games last week at Troy, the Middle Tennessee baseball team will aim to get back on track in conference play this weekend when it hits the road for Monroe, La., to take on ULM. MT has been nothing short of exceptional in bouncing back from conference losses over the years, and the Blue Raiders will hope to keep that going against the Warhawks. Since Steve Peterson took over the baseball program in 1988, MT is 105-59 (.640) in the series following a conference series loss. The Blue Raiders will also be trying to correct a 5-9 record away from the friendly confines of Reese Smith Jr. Field, which includes a 5-1 loss at Vanderbilt earlier this week. The third place Blue Raiders are currently tied with FIU with a 9-6 Sun Belt record and a 22-15 mark overall. Arkansas State carries a one game lead in second place, and Florida Atlantic leads the pack at 12-3. If MT is to turn it around, the weight of the task will likely fall on the shoulders of sophomore slugger Trent Miller, who enters the weekend leading the Blue Raiders in batting average (.374), home runs (10), runs

batted in (35), total bases (95) and slugging percentage (.660). Johnny Thomas will also be looking to continue swinging a big bat. The second baseman, who is also a part of the best double-play combo in the conference with shortstop Ryan Ford, has emerged as a power threat this season with a league-best 14 doubles and seven homers to boost his slugging percentage to .536 from .332 a year ago. The weekend pitching staff is aiming to rebound from giving up 26 runs last week. The starting trio of Hunter Adkins, Johnathan Frebis and Jonathan Sisco have helped MT to a 4.23 ERA and a .243 opponent batting average, ranking third and second in the SBC, respectively. Since the series began in 2007, MT holds a 10-7 mark against ULM. The Blue Raiders took home two out of three last season in Murfreesboro, but this weekend marks just the second-ever trip to Monroe, where the Blue and White dropped all three games in the 2008 season, the only series loss ever suffered to the Warhawks. ULM enters Friday with a 17-20 record, falling in 10 of 15 conference games to rank last in the SBC. However, they handed FAU one of its toughest tests of the season last week at Warhawk Field. After dropping a tight 9-7 contest on Friday night, ULM countered with a 13-5 decision on Saturday and the Owls had to come from behind to win in 6-5 fashion in Sunday's rubber game. Justin Guidry has become a bane to the ULM pitching staff, hitting .538 last season. In his eight career games vs. the Warhawks, the senior carries a .375 average to go along with nine runs scored, eight knocked in, four doubles and a pair of homers. Thomas and Hank LaRue were also strong in last year's series, reaching base 12 times and scoring five times in the three-game set. First pitch at Warhawk field on Friday night is set for 6 p.m.

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