Softball comeback comes up short in 5-4 defeat

MT knocked off 5-4 and 8-3 in doubleheader

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TROY, Ala. -- Down 5-0 entering the top of the sixth, the Middle Tennessee softball team tallied two runs in the sixth and another pair in the seventh, but it was not enough as the Blue Raiders fell to Troy 5-4 in Game 1 of Saturday's doubleheader at the Troy Softball Complex.

Following a scoreless inning for Troy in the bottom of the sixth, the game went to the top of the seventh with Middle Tennessee needing three runs to even the contest. Laura Dukes reached first with a one-out walk and Kristi Marquez and Nina Davenport followed with consecutive singles to load the bases with one out. Two batters later Natalie Ysais knocked a two-out single to left to score Marquez and Dukes and cut the deficit to 5-4. With runners at first and third, Kaycee Popham was intentionally walked to reload the bases and bring up Kelsey Woodruff with two outs. The Blue Raider right fielder popped up in foul territory to the Trojan first baseman, however, as the Middle Tennessee rally fell just short and the Blue Raiders went down by a 5-4 score.

The Trojans began the game by taking an early 1-0 lead when Nikki Hollett's sacrifice fly scored Michelle Hewett to give Troy the lead after one inning. Hewett then gave the home team a 3-0 lead the next frame with a two-out, two-run blast which carried just over the wall in center field. Three-consecutive singles to begin the third inning put Troy up 5-0 in the bottom of the third. Caitlin McClure then entered to pitch for Middle Tennessee starter Shelby Stinnett and prevented further damage as the game went to the fourth inning with Troy holding a 5-0 lead. The Blue Raiders threatened in the top of the fourth when Woodruff and Chelsea Good tallied back-to-back two-out singles. Samantha Nieves grounded out to third base to end the inning, however, with Middle Tennessee still trailing by five runs. Laura Dukes began the fifth with a bloop single just over the first base bag. Troy starter Ashley Rainey sat down the next three Blue Raiders, though, to end the frame with the Blue Raiders unable to cut into the Troy lead. McClure kept Middle Tennessee in the game as she limited Troy to just two hits in four innings after entering for Stinnett in the third inning. The Blue Raiders finally got on the board with two runs in the sixth inning. After Ysais reached with a one-out walk, Popham blasted a mammoth two-run blast over the left field fence to bring Middle Tennessee to within 5-2. Even with another couple of runs in the top of the seventh, the Blue Raiders came up just short as they fell 5-4 to open the doubleheader. Stinnett received the loss for Middle Tennessee as she allowed five runs on seven hits in two innings pitched. The victory went to Rainey who tossed all seven innings for Troy, surrendering four runs on nine hits. Popham and Ysais led Middle Tennessee offensively in Game 1 as they both recorded a pair of runs batted in. Meanwhile the Trojans were paced at the plate by Hewett and Sarah Shields who also notched a couple of RBIs. In Game 2, Middle Tennessee built a 2-0 advantage with a pair of runs in the top of the third. Marquez and Davenport posted back-to-back singles to put runners on first and second with none out. Good then followed with a double in the right-center field gap to score Marquez and Davenport and give the Blue Raiders a two-run lead. Troy countered with a run of its own in the bottom of the frame when Hewett singled up the middle to score Renn and cut the Middle Tennessee lead in half. Nina Dever led off the fourth with a double and she scored on a failed pick-off and error to once again give the Blue Raiders a two-run lead. Blue Raider starter Caty Jutson allowed just one run on three hits through the first four innings and appeared to be cruising along. However, the game completely changed in the bottom of the fifth. The Trojans scored five runs on six hits – all of which were singles – and one Middle Tennessee error to take a 6-3 lead after five innings. One inning later, Renn led off with a solo home run and Hollett singled home Hewett later in the frame to put the Trojans up 8-3. The Blue Raiders attempted to rally in the seventh as Davenport and Good both singled with one out. Ysais popped up to short and Popham grounded out to third, however, to end the game with Middle Tennessee falling 8-3. Following the doubleheader, the Blue Raiders now have a record of 13-29 overall, 3-14 in the Sun Belt. Troy meanwhile improved to 30-16, 9-9. Jutson was tagged with the loss, going 4.1 innings while allowing six runs (five earned) on seven hits. Trojan starter Jaycee Affeldt was the winner as she pitched a complete game, giving up just three runs on eight knocks. Good went 2-4 with two runs knocked in to help lead the Blue Raider offense. Luquette paced a balanced Troy offensive attack, going 2-4 with two RBIs.

Middle Tennessee will aim to salvage the final game of the series when the teams meet Sunday at 1 p.m.

Fans are encouraged to follow the team's Twitter (@MT_Softball)and Facebook (MTSU Softball) pages during their trip to Troy as behind-the-scenes pictures and videos will be uploaded to the sites throughout the weekend.

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