Stephens guides Blue Raiders in rout of Tennessee

Middle Tennessee has now won three consecutive over in-state foe

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Final Box Score (PDF)

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Ryan Stephens kept up his hot streak against Tennessee on Tuesday night, putting in another career day and helping the Middle Tennessee baseball team close out the 2012 home schedule with an 11-4 thumping of the Volunteers at Reese Smith Jr. Field. The sophomore, who recorded the game-winning hit earlier this season in Knoxville and came up a single shy of the cycle last year vs. the Vols, went 3-for-4 with a home run, a career-high four runs batted in and a pair of runs scored. The win marked the third consecutive for the Blue Raiders over the visitors from East Tennessee, a feat that had not been accomplished since the 1988 season, head coach Steve Peterson's first at the helm of the MT baseball program. In addition to Stephens, six other Blue Raiders recorded a hit, led by Hank LaRue, who picked up his 21st multiple hit game of the season, going 3-for-4 with a homer, three RBI and two runs. "It's a big rivalry," LaRue said. "There are a lot of Tennessee fans around here, and it's good to get a win against them. They've got a young team, but here in the next couple years they're going to be pretty good. They play the game the right way and do a lot of good things, but we were fortunate to put up enough runs tonight. So it's a big win for us." As a team, MT were even with UT in hits with 12, but the Blue Raiders were the more patient at the plate as all but one

starter earned a walk. Paul Mittura made the most of his first start of the season, tossing four innings and allowing a pair of runs on the way to his third victory of the year. Keaton Baker, Jonathan Sisco, Nathan Foriest and Joey McClung closed out the game, combining to allow six hits and two runs. The Blue Raiders jumped on top early as Ryan Ford, a Knoxville native, led off the first inning with a walk. He later stole second to move into scoring position, and a Trent Miller double brought him home to hand MT a 1-0 lead after one. The Blue and White grabbed control of the game an inning later as Jordan Rorex led off with an infield single, and Stephens followed up by unloading on a 2-0 pitch for his fifth career home run and second vs. UT. MT would keep it rolling in the second, and a few minutes later, LaRue hammered a three-run blast over the wall in left center to double the advantage and give the Blue and White a commanding 6-0 lead. "I got ahead in the count and he left a fastball up and away," LaRue said. "I was able to stay back, and the ball carried out for me. I picked up a few RBI and we got a little momentum that inning." After Tennessee reclaimed a run in the top of the third, Stephens was the catalyst once again in the response. The Murfreesboro native reached on a one-out single to right, stole second, and a failed pick-off by UT pitcher Conner Stevens allowed him to cross home. UT scored once more in the fourth, and MT answered again, this time with even more force, pushing three runs across in the bottom half. Robert Lawrence laced a single to left for the first run, and Stephens picked up two more RBI with a two-out single to right center. Lawrence finished the game 2-for-3 with two runs and two walks. The Volunteers picked up a run in the fifth and ninth to account for the final score. "This was a very, very good win," Peterson said. "Hopefully it gives my team momentum going into the weekend because we need a much bigger win up at Western to get us into the tournament." The Blue Raiders will now prepare to close out the regular season with a series at WKU, set to begin on Thursday in Bowling Green. MT currently sits in fifth in the Sun Belt Conference and is a win away from clinching a return to the conference tournament later this month.

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