Blue Raiders drop extra-inning heartbreaker at WKU

MT clinches Sun Belt Tournament berth despite loss

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Final Box Score (PDF)

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. - The Middle Tennessee baseball team rallied twice against WKU to force extra innings on Friday night, but the Blue Raiders dropped a heartbreaker, 5-4, in 13 innings at Nick Denes Field. Despite the loss, MT clinched a berth for next week's Sun Belt Tournament based on other results in the league. "We will take any way we can to get in the tournament, then we'll see what happens after that because you just never know in baseball," head coach Steve Peterson said. "Obviously, we'd love to take a win entering the tournament. My team played hard (tonight), but we had all kinds of chances and couldn't get it done. I know we left a lot of runners on because we couldn't get big hits and made some crucial mistakes." The Blue Raiders (28-27, 13-16 SBC) stranded 20 base-runners in the contest, primarily due to a plethora of two-out hits. MT scored all four of its runs with two outs and collected 10 two-out hits, but failed to string together more than two hits in any two-out situation. The Blue Raiders drew first blood on Ryan Ford's RBI-single in the second. Ryan Stephens drew a two-out walk and Dain McNabb followed with a base-knock to left in front of Ford's run-scoring rip to right. Ford would finish 2-for-7 with a pair of RBI, while McNabb went 2-for-4 with an RBI a run and a pair of key sacrifices. WKU (24-30, 13-16 SBC) evened the score in the third on a pair of singles from Blake Crabtree and Scott Wilcox, then put two more on the board in the fifth for

a 3-1 lead. Crabtree and Jared Andreoli reached on singles and moved up on a wild pitch before Ivan Hartle smacked one back up the middle to deliver the two-run blow. MT immediately responded with a pair of runs to knot the game at three all in the sixth, once again coming up with key two-out hitting. Jordan Rorex knocked one to left and McNabb laced a two-out double to the right-center gap to bring the Blue Raiders within one. Ford tied it up with a shot up the middle the middle for his second RBI of the day. Still tied at 3-3 in the seventh, WKU managed to push a run across on a Blue Raider miscue. Crabtree took a walk to open the frame and made his way to second on another Hartle single. Wilcox grounded to third, but Justin Guidry's throw to second hit Hartle and rolled into the outfield, allowing Crabtree to charge home from third for the go-ahead run. The Hilltoppers loaded the bases on another walk, but Hank LaRue, McNabb and Guidry combined for a clutch double play to prevent any further damage. That defensive momentum carried into the eighth where the Blue Raiders rallied again, scoring another two-out run to re-tie the game at four. Stephens sparked the comeback with a leadoff single and McNabb bunted him to second. Guidry delivered the game-tying run with a two-out base-knock to right-center as Stephens crossed the plate for the second time. The two teams would remain knotted through the next four frames, with each side working out of jams to preserve the tie. MT left two on in the 10th, stranded Stephens at third with one out in the 12th and loaded the bases in the 13th, but couldn't come up with the timely hit. The Hilltoppers left two on in the 10th before tallying the game-winning run in the 13th. It was Jared Andreoli with the bases-loaded single that broke up the stalemate and handed WKU the victory. Joey McClung (4-2) suffered the loss for MT despite a solid relief effort of 5.0 innings. He allowed three hits and just the one run while striking out four. Justin Hageman (4-6) picked up the win for WKU after holding MT scoreless through 5.2 while giving up four hits. The two teams will meet for the final game of the regular season on Saturday at 1 p.m. Johnathan Frebis will take the mound for MT. Dick Palmer and John Callow will have the call on WMOT 89.5.

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