

MT Wins SBC Opener 7-5

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Middle Tennessee got several outstanding performances in its 7-5 win over New Orleans on Friday night, but none of them was as big as the two innings of relief turned in by senior right-hander Jeremy Armstrong. Armstrong came into the game in the eighth inning after starter John Williams had surrendered a leadoff single to R.J. Elbin. The situation worsened for Armstrong after a MT error on a bunt attempt put runners at second and third with no outs and the Blue Raiders hanging on to a tenuous one-run lead. Armstrong coaxed a fly ball out of pinch-hitter Drew Pizza for the first out of the inning

and then intentionally walked leadoff hitter Donnie Bollich to load the bases and set up a double play. Armstrong then struck out pinch hitter Chris Adams and got J.D. Huether to pop up to second to end the inning and snuff out any life left in the Privateers. He went on to finish the job in the ninth inning to seal the Blue Raider win and upend the Privateers for the first time in the last nine home conference openers. Armstrong's save was his second of the year and solidified him as the team's top reliever at this point in the season. As brilliant as Armstrong was, it was the battling of starter John Williams that kept the Blue Raiders in the game. Williams, who ran his record to 4-0 with the win, battled through seven-plus innings. He worked through several jams in the contest to give his offense a chance to win the game, and the offense delivered. The Blue Raiders pounded out 12 hits against a strong UNO pitching staff and used home runs from junior Justin Sims, freshman Nate Jagers, and senior Marshall Nisbett to power the Blue Raiders into leads on three separate occasions. However, the Blue Raiders really had nothing to do with taking the lead for the final time in the eighth. A one-out single from Jason Howarth followed by a double from Brett Carroll put runners at second and third. Troy Harp struck out for the second out and things looked bleak for the Blue Raiders as defensive replacement Joe Capone stood at the plate with a 1-2 count. Capone stood and watched as a pitch from reliever Jeff Stander bounced in front of the plate and over the head of Privateer catcher Kody Valverde, allowing Howarth to score from third and give the Blue Raiders a 6-5 advantage. The Blue Raiders then added an insurance run in the top of the ninth after back-to-back singles from Chuck Akers and Nate Jagers started the frame and Sims finished the job with a sacrifice fly to center that sealed the win. Jagers and Howarth led the Blue Raider attack

with three hits each and Nisbett turned in a two-hit performance of his own. Justin Lofranco paced the Privateers with a 3-for-4 effort at the plate. Middle Tennessee and New Orleans are slated to do battle on Saturday afternoon at 1 PM. The series is scheduled to conclude on Sunday afternoon with a 1 PM start. The games will also be broadcast on WMTS FM 88.3 beginning at 12:45. The game can also be heard via the internet at GoBlueRaiders.com.

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