

Contact: Harold Jameson
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Blazers End Muleriders Bid For Tourney Title

Millington, Tenn. - Valdosta State University, a 4-2 loser to Southern Arkansas University here Thursday in the opening round of the Gulf South Conference Tournament, came back from the brink of elimination Saturday against Delta State University to advance Sunday against the Muleriders. VSU avenged Thursday's loss by nipping the 'Riders 3-1, sending SAU packing and advancing themselves into the championship game against DSU at 4 p.m. Sunday with a 33-25 record.

The parity of the GSC has been evident in the tourney with only one mismatch, Valdosta State's 20-2 rout of Arkansas Tech University. Squeakers include Delta State 11-10 over the University of West Alabama in 11 innings, West Alabama 5-4 over the University of Alabama-Huntsville, Delta State 6-5 over the University of Central Arkansas, Valdosta State 7-6 over Central Arkansas in 11 innings, and Valdosta State's dramatic two-out 10-9 win over Delta State in the bottom of the ninth that changed a 9-6 DSU advantage with one swing of the bat, a grand slam home run, that gave the Blazers a second chance at the 'Riders.

Pitching continues to dominate hitting and Valdosta State got excellent performances from Adam Lingenfelter and Michael Martinez. Lingenfelter went the first three innings and allowed the 'Riders only one hit, walking three, and fanning one. He gave way to Martinez, who went the final six innings, holding SAU to five hits, one earned run, walked none, and struck out six to get the win and run his record to 4-2.

Drew Garner pitched the first eight innings for SAU and gave up 13 hits, three earned runs, walked none, hit one batter, and struck out four to take the loss and drop to 4-2 for the year. Dustin Eisenbraun worked the final inning, giving up one hit and a wild pitch.

The Blazers had three runs, 14 hits, were issued no bases on balls, had one hit batter, and one wild pitch. The slugging 'Riders were limited to only one run, six hits, and three walks. VSU had two errors and SAU one. The Blazers stranded 11 and the 'Riders eight.

The game was scoreless through the first three innings before VSU scored the first run of the game in the top of the fourth inning and added another in the fifth. It was the seventh inning before the 'Riders managed to score their only run and the Blazers finished the scoring with a run in the top of the ninth.

Shortstop Robert Morgan had the big blow of the game for the Blazers when he led off the ninth inning with a solo home run. VSU's first run was on back-to-back doubles by designated hitter Greg Adams and outfielder Jermaine Johnson that produced the game's first run in the fourth. With two away in the fifth, outfielder John McDonald doubled and was singled home by third baseman Greg Connell for run number two.

Shortstop Armando Alvarez singled in the seventh with one away and advanced to second on a fielder's choice. Outfielder Aharon Eggleston tripled Alvarez home for the only SAU run.

For VSU, Connell was three for five and drove in a run, Adams was two for four and scored, second baseman Ryan Chromek was two for four, Morgan was two for five, scored, and drove in a run, and McDonald was two for five and scored.

For SAU, catcher Ross Boudreaux was the only SAU player to get two hits, as he was two for four. Designated hitter Daniel Moseley had two sacrifices.

Perhaps the key play in the outcome of the game was in the second inning when Boudreaux led off the inning for SAU with a single and stole second. Third baseman Brent Foster walked, Moseley sacrificed both runners to third and second, respectively. Outfielder Clayton Childers walked to load the bases with one away. Alvarez hit a line shot to second base that was turned into a double play to erase the threat.

In spite of the setback, SAU added another school record. When Eggleston took his first at-bat against the Blazers, it was his 216th of the season. The old record was 215 set in 2003 by shortstop Geraldo Valentin, who had erased outfielder Tim Evans' record of 204 set in 1991.

The 'Riders, 43-13 for the year, will now have to wait and see if their season continues. SAU went into the conference tourney ranked third in the NCAA South Central Region. The top four teams in the region advance to Thursday's tourney. How SAU's 3-2 showing in the conference tournament is viewed by voters will determine their fate.