

ASU's Season Ends with Loss to Villanova

Written by Mike Flynn

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Matt Szczur scored four touchdowns and threw for another to lift No. 10 Villanova to a 42-24 win over top-seeded Appalachian State University in the 2010 NCAA Division I Football Championship quarterfinals on Saturday at Kidd Brewer Stadium.

With the loss, Appalachian's season ended at 10-3 while Villanova (9-4) advanced to next week's semifinals. Villanova will travel to face the winner of Saturday's Eastern Washington-North Dakota State quarterfinal.

Villanova, who went 3-3 in the middle of the season when Szczur was sidelined with an ankle injury, rode the senior to the final four. The wide receiver/running back/"Wildcat" quarterback combined for 207 yards — he rushed for 104 yards and three touchdowns, caught five passes for 45 yards and another score and completed both of his pass attempts for 58 yards, including a 54-yard touchdown to Norman White in the first quarter.

"They are really a good football team, said ASU coach Jerry Moore. "They're a multi-talented team, probably as balanced as any team we've played in a real long time. We gave up a couple of big plays in the first half, and then we had opportunities in the second but we weren't able to cash in on them.

"(Szczur) rushed the ball more than anyone else on the team. He's a terrific football player who can do a lot of things, as we saw today. I would have to say the he made a huge difference today."

The scoring pass to White capped the first of three-consecutive touchdown drives for Villanova that turned ASU's early 10-7 lead into a 28-10 deficit just over midway through the second quarter.

The Wildcats took the 28-10 lead into halftime but the Mountaineers grabbed the momentum after the break by forcing three-straight punts to open the third quarter. Late in the period, ASU capitalized on the stops and cut the deficit to 28-17 when DeAndre Presley (Tampa, Fla./Middleton) found tight end Ben Jorden (Weddington, N.C./Charlotte Latin) for a 14-yard touchdown pass, the Mountaineers' first touchdown since Travaris Cadet (Miami, Fla./Central) scored on a 46-yard run on the third play of the game.

With a vocal crowd of 15,706 rising to a fever pitch, the energy was sapped out of the stadium

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on the first play of Villanova's ensuing drive when Appalachian was flagged for a controversial roughing-the-passer penalty that gave VU its first first down of the second half. Eight plays later, Szczur scored from a yard out to stretch the Wildcats' lead back to 18 points at 35-17. Despite protests from ASU's bench and the Mountaineer faithful, Szczur was awarded the touchdown on third-and-goal when he stretched to reach the goal line as he was dragged to the ground by D.J. Smith (Charlotte, N.C./Independence) and the call by the Missouri Valley Football Conference field crew was upheld by an instant replay official from the Atlantic Coast Conference.

After the disputed score, the Mountaineers kept hope alive with Presley's second touchdown pass of the afternoon, a 38-yarder to Brian Quick (Columbia, S.C./Ridge View) that cut the deficit back to 11 points at 35-24. Momentum then swung firmly back in Appalachian's corner when Andrew Peacock (Durham, N.C./Northern Durham) forced Villanova's Angelo Babbaro to fumble the ensuing kickoff and Karl Anderson (Pilot Point, Texas/Pilot Point) recovered to give ASU the ball at the VU 44 yard line.

However, the Mountaineers could not capitalize on the great field position, turning the ball over on downs when Presley's pass to Tony Washington (High Point, N.C./T.W. Andrews) came up a yard short on fourth-and-six. Two plays later, Villanova quarterback Chris Whitney put the game out of reach when he scored on a five-yard keeper that gave the Wildcats a 42-24 lead. "They really didn't do anything different besides take away the quarterback runs," said ASU quarterback DeAndre Presley. "The main concern for us was not turning the ball over, but we did turn the ball over and they made the most of those opportunities."

Presley threw for a career-high 361 yards in the losing effort, completing 31 of his ASU-postseason-record 56 pass attempts. Playing their final games in the Black and Gold, seniors Devon Moore (Mebane, N.C./Cedar Ridge), Matt Cline (Thomasville, N.C./Glenn) and CoCo Hillary (Edgefield, S.C./Strom Thurmond) caught five passes apiece. Cadet led the team with 80 yards on the ground.

"Today we had a complimentary offense and defense," said Villanova coach Andy Talley. "The defense had some tremendous stops, a goal line stand and got a stop after we fumbled the kick off. All in all having Matt Szczur back continues to be a good thing for us. "

Defensively, D.J. Smith (Charlotte, N.C./Independence) wrapped up one of the most prolific

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careers in Appalachian history with 12 tackles and a sack. The linebacker finished his senior season by amassing double-digit tackles in 10 of the final 11 games of the campaign and closed his career with 525 stops, the second-most in school history and fourth-highest total in Southern Conference history. Fellow Buck Buchanan Award candidate Jabari Fletcher (Atlanta, Ga./Grady) chipped in with five tackles, including two for loss, a sack and a forced fumble.

NOTES: Appalachian outgained Villanova, 461-449 ... the loss was only the Mountaineers' fourth in their last 59 home games and their second in the last 15 postseason tilts at Kidd Brewer Stadium ... Presley's career-best 361 passing yards were the third-most in ASU postseason history and rank 13th overall in school history ... Moore's 93 receiving yards and 74-yard reception in the first quarter were both career highs ... Appalachian's four sacks of Villanova quarterbacks matched its second-highest total of the season ... ASU rushed for 82 yards in the first quarter but only 18 more the rest of the game ... Appalachian head coach Jerry Moore must wait until next season's opener at Virginia Tech to go for his 200th win as ASU's head coach — he finishes his 22nd year at the helm of the Mountaineers with a 199-79 record at the school ... Saturday's boisterous crowd of 15,706 was the sixth-largest in 24 all-time postseason games at Kidd Brewer Stadium ... Appalachian fell to 17-7 all-time in NCAA Division I Football Championship games at home while Villanova moved to 2-6 in playoff games on the road ... both of ASU's losses to NCAA Division I FCS opponents this year came at the hands of national semifinalists — in addition to Villanova, Georgia Southern advanced to the semifinals with a 23-20 win at Wofford on Saturday.