Written by Mike Kelly Saturday, 05 March 2011 21:52

Wofford College is just two wins away from defending its Southern Conference championship.

The Terriers marched their way into the semifinal round by knocking off Appalachian State 69-56 on Saturday afternoon in the quarterfinal round of the SoCon tournament at McKenzie Arena in Chattanooga. And the Terriers (19-12) did it by physically beating up the Mountaineers in the second half.

But the Mountaineers, who withstood an early assault by the Terriers (who made seven of their first eight shots), rallied from a seven-point deficit and forced a 32-32 tie at the intermission. A pair of free throws by Nathan Healy tied the game with six seconds left in the first half. And the Mountaineers (16-15) carried that momentum into the second half. A jumper by Omar Carter gave ASU a 38-37 lead with 16:31 to go.

But from that point on, the Terriers took control. A three-point play by Cameron Rundles ignited a 10-2 run and put Wofford on top to stay.

"Appalachian gave us their best shot, and we took it," said Wofford coach Mike Young. "This is an old team. They're veteran players. There's no pressure on us. Our locker room is like a circus. These guys love to be in this situation. They want to repeat as conference champions." The Mountaineers did their best to stay close. A jumper by Carter and a pair of free throws by Donald Sims brought ASU within 47-44 with 12:57 to play. But the offense disappeared from that point on and the Terriers put the contest away.

A 12-1 run gave Wofford a 59-45 lead with 5:50 left. Noah Dahlman had eight points during that spurt. And the Mountaineers, who went more than eight minutes without a field goal, never recovered.

"Dahlman is a great player," said Andre Williamson of the Mountaineers. "You have to stay on top of him constantly, or he will simply dominate you. He's like any great player. He knows how to take advantage of a situation. He's tough inside, and he had his way in the second half." Dahlman simply dominated ASU with a game-high 21 points on 9-15 shooting. He also had six rebounds and two assists. Rundles and Brad Loesing had 12 points each. Sims led ASU with 14 points in his final game as a Mountaineer. Carter had 12 on 6-18 shooting.

"Wofford is a great team," said ASU coach Jason Capel. "We missed a lot of shots that we would normally make, but credit a lot of that to Wofford's defense. They are the best defensive team in the conference. They also got back in transition. They never allowed us to run the floor." Williamson, who turned in his best game of the year with 11 points and 13 rebounds on 5-10 shooting, got ASU within ten at 61-51 with two minutes to go. But the Mountaineers never got any closer. The Terriers scored six consecutive points and took their biggest lead at 67-51 on a pair of free throws by Dahlman moments later.

The Terriers shot 48% from the floor, and 44% (4-9) from the three-point line. ASU, on the other hand, shot 38% from the floor and was a season-worst 1-12 on three-point attempts. The Terriers also held Sims to just eight field-goal attempts.

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"They're physcial," Capel said. "And they're not going to beat themselves. We were 1-12 on threes. That's our worst effort of the year. We ran out of gas, but that's no excuse. We came in here ready to play four games. To beat them, you have to play solid for 40 minutes and we just wore down a little bit. But we gave them our best shot."

The Terriers will now play Western Carolina in the semifinals Sunday night at 6 pm. Western defeated UNC-Greensboro 77-66 in Saturday's first quarterfinal game. Tomorrow night's game is also a rematch of last year's semifinal showdown, which the Terriers won on their way to the conference title.

Our coverage of the SoCon tournament on AM 1450, WATA continues on Sunday. We will join the ASU women's game with Elon at 12 noon. Our coverage of the men's tournament begins at 5:45 pm Sunday night.

WOFFORD 69, ASU 56

1 2 T APPALACHIAN STATE 32 24 - 56 WOFFORD COLLEGE 32 37 - 69

ASU: BREEZE 5, WILLIAMSON 11 (13 REBOUNDS), SIMS 14, WRIGHT 6, CARTER 12, HEALY 4, WOODS 2, HAUSLEY 2. FG: 22-56, 3FG: 1-12, FT: 11-16. 31 REBOUNDS, 4 TURNOVERS.

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WOFFORD: JOHNSON 6 (7 REBOUNDS), DAHLMAN 21 (6 REBOUNDS), RUNDLES 12, DIGGS 11, LOESING 12, GILTNER 3, MARTIN 4. FG: 28-58, 3FG: 4-9, FT: 9-12. 38 REBOUNDS, 4 TURNOVERS.