

Comeback Falls Short in 5-4 Loss to Samford

Written by Mike Flynn
Saturday, 16 April 2011 18:30

Appalachian State University baseball's furious ninth-inning rally came up just short in Saturday's 5-4 loss to Samford at Beaver Field at Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium.

Appalachian (21-16, 7-10 SoCon) trailed 5-0 going into the bottom of the ninth but sent nine batters to the plate in its final at-bat. ASU cut the deficit to one run on Lawrence Pardo's pinch-hit grand slam and put the winning run on base before Samford (22-14, 10-7 SoCon) was finally able to seal the victory.

"We had the right people up in the ninth, but we couldn't pull this off," said ASU coach Chris Pollard. "I told them after the game, don't let this deflate you, but let it inflate you for Sunday's final game."

Samford starter Charles Bradford (4-3) cruised into the ninth inning with an eight-hit shutout but hit Daniel Kassouf with a 3-2 pitch to lead off the frame. Zack Briggs followed with what looked like a double-play groundball but SU shortstop Tyler Filliben made a low and outside throw to second base, seemingly pulling teammate Michael Johnson off the bag and allowing Kassouf to slide in safely. However, Kassouf was ruled out on the play.

The controversial call at second became a huge storyline in the game when Bradford and Samford closer Andrew Jones walked the next two batters to load the bases for Pardo, who blasted a 3-2 pitch from Jones over the right center field wall for his first career home run, cutting the ASU deficit to 5-4.

After Hector Crespo popped out for the second out of the inning, Tyler Zupcic and Trey Holmes both singled to put the tying run in scoring position and the winning run on base. However, Samford's third pitcher of the ninth inning, Grant Sides, struck out Jack Myers on yet another full-count pitch to end the game.

Bradford and Samford right fielder Brandon Miller were almost solely responsible for Appalachian facing a five-run deficit in the final inning. Despite running into trouble in the ninth, Bradford was charged with just two runs on eight hits, issued only one walk and struck out a career-high 10 in 8.1 innings of work.

Miller provided four of the Bulldogs' five runs with a pair of home runs, a solo shot in the first inning and a three-run blast in the fifth that upped his season total to 14. Brad Moss drove in SU's only other run when he followed Johnson's leadoff triple with an RBI single in the first. Appalachian outhit Samford, 11-8, but ASU issued five walks and left eight men on base in the loss, which snapped a season-best five-game winning streak. Zupcic led the way for the Mountaineers with a 3-for-5 performance. Holmes, Myers and Jeremy Dowdy chipped in with two hits apiece.

"It was a well-played game on both sides," Pollard said. "I thought their starting pitcher (Charles Bradford) did a great job. We just have to get it done tomorrow, and play hard."

The Mountaineers and Bulldogs play the rubber game of their three-game weekend series on Sunday at noon. Sunday is Baseball For Babies Day at Smith Stadium, with free admission to both the game and the subsequent High Country March For Babies with a donation to the March of Dimes. ASU athletics hopes to set a Smith Stadium attendance record in conjunction with the March For Babies event, which will feature appearances by a wide range of Mountaineer coaches, student-athletes and cheerleaders and a plethora

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fun-for-the-whole-family activities in an effort to raise money for the March of Dimes. Radio coverage of Sunday's game begins at 11:40 pm on AM 1450, WATA.