

ASU Volleyball Splits Saturday Tournament Matches

Written by Charles Cochrum
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Less than a full day after opening the season with an impressive win against NC State, Appalachian State University volleyball returned to the court to sweep Kennesaw State, 25-18, 25-21, 25-17, on Saturday afternoon in the Appalachian Invitational. In the tournament finale, Charlotte pulled out a 3-2 win, 25-16, 23-25, 25-21, 17-25, 15-12. Anna Wagner earned all-tournament honors and Kelly Rhein was named the Most Valuable Player.

Match 1 - vs. Kennesaw State

Senior Kelly Rhein paced the ASU offense with 16 kills and no errors on 26 attacks. Her .615 hitting percentage easily led all players, while the Apps recorded a solid .301 mark for the match. Rhein added four digs and an assist on the afternoon as well. Classmate Kasey Sauls set up 42 of ASU's 46 assists to accompany seven digs and three kills.

ASU (2-0) jumped out to a 15-3 lead in the opening set and weathered a late Owl rally to cruise to the 25-18 win. KSU (0-2) started strong in the second set with an early 12-5 lead.

Appalachian then responded to gain a 14-13 advantage as the play evened out. ASU finished strong with five of the final six points to break the eighth tie of the set at 20-20.

The third set left little to chance as ASU put together a 10-3 run to break a 7-7 tie and secure the win and remain undefeated in the season-opening tournament. An Anna Wagner kill punctuated the 25-17 win. Following her 31-kill performance on Friday night, Wagner cooled off to convert a modest eight kills. She added 10 digs, two assists and a block.

Meghann Forshey added nine kills on 21 attacks with a block and fellow junior Courtney Rhein chipped in a team-high 13 digs with an assist. In the middle, Alison Blasingame hit .545 with seven kills to accompany two digs and a pair of blocks.

KSU owned a 7-4 advantage in blocks but hit just .090 in the match. Emily Bean led the Owls with 15 digs and seven kills.

Match 2 - vs. Charlotte

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The first set opened with a back-and-forth style before Charlotte grabbed hold of a 10-6 lead and extended it to 19-11 before the Mountaineers caught their breath. The Apps pulled within five points at 21-16 on a Sauls and Lauren Gray block, but the 49ers tallied the final four points to take the set.

The squads traded the lead five times and tied each other twice in the second set, as neither team led by more than three points throughout. Following a 19-19 tie, Appalachian wrested control with enough of a spurt to claim a 25-23 win on a kill by Kelly Rhein.

The Niners took hold of momentum following the intermission with a tight 25-21 win in the third set. The score stayed within three points — including nine ties and six lead changes — until Charlotte grabbed an 18-14 lead and maintained at least a two-point cushion the rest of the way.

Intensity stepped up dramatically in the fourth set, as the momentum swung back to the home team. After a tight beginning, Appalachian loosened the game up behind the strength of seven Wagner kills. The final 25-17 margin was ASU's largest lead in the frame.

Charlotte staked a 4-1 lead in the deciding set before Kelly Rhein followed a kill with a solo block to draw the Apps even at 6-6. ASU gained a one-point lead on a Charlotte attack error, but the 49ers took it back and refused to let it go. UNCC completed the 15-12 win on a setter dump.

Wagner led the Apps with 20 kills and a .271 hitting percentage to accompany seven digs and a pair of kills. Kelly Rhein added 16 kills with just three errors. She hit .351 and nothed six digs, two blocks and a pair of assists.

Kasey Sauls chipped in 39 assists, eight digs and three blocks, while Alison Blasingame patrolled the net with four blocks in addition to five kills and four digs.

Courtney Rhein again led the Appalachian defense, with 19 of ASU's 55 digs. Charlotte's Bianca Rouse converted a match-high 24 kills and a .378 hitting clip, while three players recorded double-figure digs for Chris Redding's squad.

ASU hosts William & Mary at 3 p.m. on Sunday in a late addition to the 2011 schedule. W&M's weekend tournament was cancelled in anticipation of inclement weather. W&M will also face Kennesaw State on Sunday at 10 a.m. in the Holmes Center. Admission is free to both matches.