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Appalachian State University men's basketball was unable to hang on to a 13-point lead in a 70-64 loss at arch rival Western Carolina to open Southern Conference play on Saturday at the Ramsey Center. The Mountaineers (1-7, 0-1 SoCon), who led 43-30 with 16:57 left in the second half, were unable to overcome a furious

second-half rally by the Catamounts (4-6, 2-0), who outscored the Appalachian by a 44-28 tally in the second half

"It's really been the story of our season," said Nathan Healy. "We play well enough to win, but we can't close things out. We have to learn how to finish games."

In a first half that provided plenty of entertainment, Appalachian found itself down by four points (24-20) with 5:19 on the clock, but reeled off a 16-2 run to close out the half and took a 36-26 lead into the locker room. The Mountaineer run began when Chris Burgess nailed a jumper to pull the Apps within two (24-22) before Tab Hamilton grabbed a defensive rebound and threw down a dunk to tie the game with 4:18 left in the half.

App State would seize all the momentum from their as Healy scored six of his 15 points in the final two and a half minutes of the first period to send the Mountaineers to the break with a 10-point lead. The run would continue in the second half as Michael Obacha (Edo State, Nigeria/High Point Christian Academy) scored the first bucket of the half to extend the lead to 12 points (38-26). Jamaal Trice hit a jumper at 16:57 to give Appalachian its largest lead of the contest (43-30).

But Western Carolina would not go quietly as the Catamounts began to chip away at the deficit. After a Brian Okam free throw gave Appalachian a nine-point lead (49-40) with just over 11 minutes remaining, the Catamounts went on a 15-6 run to tie the contest at 55-55 and regained the lead on a pair of Tawaski King free throws with 5:01 on the clock.

Appalachian would regain the lead in the final three minutes before a Catamount three pointer gave WCU a 61-60 lead with just under three minutes to play. Western would scored nine of the next 13 points to complete its comeback and stay perfect in conference play.

"There's no secret that we don't like them, and that they don't like us," Healy said. "And when you play a team seven, eight, or nine times, it goes beyond the X's and O's. It's more about effort."

Jay Canty led all players with 22 points while also grabbing eight rebounds and dishing out three assists. Hamilton poured in 10 points and Healy snagged a game-high nine rebounds. Western Carolina was paced by 19 points from Tom Tankelewicz, who was 5-of-8 from beyond the arc. The Catamounts also got double-digit scoring outputs from King (14), Trey Sumler (13) and James Sinclair (12).

On the day, the Mountaineers shot 38.2 percent (21-of-55) from the floor and were hurt at the free-throw line, where they connected on just 17-of-28 shots (60.7 percent). Western Carolina shot 41.8 percent (23-of-55) from the floor and knocked down 17-of-24 free throws. Appalachian finished with a 36-35 edge in rebounds and tallied four blocks in the contest to WCU's three.

The Mountaineers return to non-conference action at UMKC on Saturday at 2 p.m. before heading back to east to take on South Carolina at 5 p.m. on Dec. 19.

GAME NOTES: Appalachian fell to 111-67 all-time against Western Carolina... the Apps are

now 41-41 when facing the Catamounts in Cullowhee... Saturday's defeat marks the team's seventh-straight road loss dating back to last season... Canty became the first Mountaineer to score 20 or more points in back-to-back games since Donald Sims accomplished the feat near the end of the 2010-11 season... the Mountaineers dropped to 21-21 in SoCon openers including a 9-15 mark in conference openers played on the road.

WCU 70, ASU 64

Score by periods	**1st**	**2nd**	**Total**
Appalachian State	36	28	64
Western Carolina	26	44	70

ASU: OBACHA 7, HEALY 15 (9 REBOUNDS), CANTY 22 (8 REBOUNDS, 3 ASSISTS), HAMILTON 10, TRICE 5, BURGESS 4, OKAM 1. FG: 21-55. 3FG: 5-19, FT: 17-28. 36 REBOUNDS, 8 ASSISTS, NINE REBOUNDS.
THREE-POINTERS: CANTY 2, HAMILTON, HEALY, TRICE.

WCU: KING 14 (8 REBOUNDS), ROSS 4, TANKELEWICZ 19, SUMLER 13 (6 REBOUNDS), SINCLAIR 12 (7 REBOUNDS), BOGGS 8. FG: 23-35, 3FG: 7-18, FT: 35 REBOUNDS, 5 ASSISTS, 8 TURNOVERS.
THREE-POINTERS: TANKELEWICZ 5, SINCLAIR 2.

Photo Courtesy: Trey Suimler of WCU, SoCon Athletics