Written by Mike Flynn
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Coming off the most successful campaign in its 109-year program history, Appalachian State University baseball opens the 2013 season this weekend with a challenging three-game series at No. 8 NC State. Game times are set for 3 p.m. Friday,

4 p.m. Saturday and 1 p.m. Sunday at Doak Field in Raleigh, N.C. Friday's season opener will be broadcast live on the Appalachian IMG Sports Network and can be heard locally on WATA 1450 AM and worldwide at GoASU.com. Coverage begins at 2:40 p.m.

This weekend's series is one of only three matchups in the nation this weekend that pit teams that were both nationally ranked at the end of last season (RIce-Stanford and Louisville-Purdue being the others). For the first time in school history, Appalachian State was ranked in one of college baseball's major national polls to close a campaign, coming in at No. 29 in the final Collegiate Baseball Newspaper poll of 2012 while NC State was as high as No. 12 in college baseball's final rankings last season.

This season, NC State rides the expectations that come from returning the core of last year's squad that went 43-20 and advanced to the NCAA Super Regional round a year ago. The Wolfpack is ranked No. 8 nationally by Baseball America (its highest preseason ranking ever) and were picked to win the powerful Atlantic Coast Conference by the league's coaches.

Leading the way for the Pack are a pair of preseason first-team all-Americans in pitcher Carlos Rodon and shortstop Trae Turner. Both sophomores, Rodon and Turner are the youngest players on Baseball America's preseason first-team all-America squad and Rodon, who posted a 9-0 record and 1.57 ERA as a freshman last season, is considered by many to be the likely No. 1 pick in the 2014 Major League Baseball Draft.

On the other hand, prognosticators do not expect Appalachian State to replicate the success it enjoyed last year, when it recorded a school-record 41 victories, won its first Southern Conference championship since 1987, earned its first NCAA postseason berth since 1986 and fell just three wins shy of advancing to the College World Series for the first time in program history. Despite returning five position starters and three pitchers that made at least five starts a season ago, both the league's coaches and Baseball America have tabbed Appalachian to finish sixth in the competitive SoCon race.

However, the Mountaineers are poised to prove the preseason predictions wrong, like they did last year when they were picked to finish fifth by the coaches and sixth by the media in the preseason SoCon polls. Leading the way is the double-play combination of senior shortstop Will Callaway and senior second baseman Hector Crespo. Both Callaway and Crespo garnered preseason all-conference recognition after combining to hit .314 with 28 doubles, seven home runs, 76 RBI and 53 stolen bases as a duo last season.

On the mound, Appalachian State will hand the ball to RHP Jamie Nunn for Friday's season opener. Like NC State's Rodon, Nunn was a freshman all-American in 2012, earning third-team honors after going 5-2 with a 4.24 ERA as a rookie. Nunn will be followed in the weekend

rotation by fellow sophomore Jeffrey Springs (2-1, 4.80 ERA in 2012) and junior transfer Sam Agnew-Wieland.
NC State has won nine of the previous 11 matchups between the two clubs, including taking 2-of-3 games from the Mountaineers to open the 2008 campaign.
In addition to being their first series in the Black and Gold, this weekend's matchup will also serve as a homecoming for Appalachian State first-year head coach Billy Jones and assistants Michael Rogers and Matt Payne. Jones was an assistant under NC State head coach Elliott Avent for three seasons from 2002-04 while Rogers and Payne were standout players for the Wolfpack from 2002-04 and 2005-08, respectively.
Following the season-opening series in Raleigh, Appalachian State opens the home portion of its 2013 slate on Monday when it hosts Canisius at 3 p.m. at Beaver Field at Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium.

APPALACHIAN STATE BASEBALL (41-18) at No. 8 NC State (43-20)
Friday-Sunday, Feb. 15-17 • Raleigh, N.C. • Doak Field
Date Time Projected App State Starting Pitcher Projected NC State Starting Pitcher
Friday, Feb. 15 3 p.m. So. RHP Jamie Nunn (5-2, 4.24 ERA) So. LHP Carlos Rodon (9-0, 1.57 ERA)
Saturday, Feb. 16 4 p.m. So. LHP Jeffrey Springs (2-1, 4.80 ERA) So. RHP Logan Jernigan (5-1, 5.71 ERA)
Sunday, Feb. 17 1 p.m. Jr. RHP Sam Agnew-Wieland (N/A) Sr. RHP Ethan Ogburn (5-4, 3.38 ERA)
*** all records and stats from 2012.

Photo Courtesy: Jamie Nunn, ASU Athletics