

## Epic Rally Lifts ASU To Walk-Off Win

Written by Mike Flynn  
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Dillon Dobson's (Boonville, N.C./Starmount) walk-off double capped Appalachian State University baseball's from an 8-1 seventh-inning deficit and lifted the Mountaineers to a thrilling 9-8 win over Western Carolina in Saturday's regular-season finale at Beaver Field at Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium. With the victory,

Appalachian State (28-22, 13-14 SoCon) clinched fifth place in the final Southern Conference standings. The Apps play fourth-seeded The Citadel (32-24, 18-12 SoCon) in the 2013 Southern Conference Tournament opener on Wednesday at 10 a.m. at Fluor Field in Greenville, S.C.

It looked like Appalachian would ride a four-game SoCon losing streak into the tournament when regular-season champion Western Carolina (38-18, 23-7 SoCon) scored three runs in the top of the seventh inning to take a commanding 8-1 lead. However, the Mountaineers scored two runs in the seventh, three in the eighth and three more in the ninth off WCU closer Preston Hatcher to complete the come-from-behind win.

The epic rally came exactly one year after Appalachian State scored five ninth-inning runs off Hatcher in a SoCon-title-clinching 5-4 triumph at Western Carolina. Much like Appalachian's historic victory in Cullowhee, N.C. last season, Hatcher was brought on Saturday in a non-save situation but blew a big lead en route to a heart-breaking loss.

The Mountaineers had already cut the deficit to 8-3 when Hatcher was summoned from the bullpen with runners on first and second base and nobody out in the eighth. The SoCon saves leader promptly walked the first batter he faced then surrendered three runs (two inherited, one of his own) before escaping the eighth with a narrow 8-6 lead still intact.

After Jeffrey Springs (Belmont, N.C./South Point) worked his second-straight scoreless inning in the top of the ninth, Hatcher got things going for the Apps in the bottom of the stanza when he hit Brandon Burris (Concord, N.C./Mount Pleasant) with the first pitch of inning. Hector Crespo (Miami, Fla./Florida Christian) followed by legging out a double to shallow center field and the Mountaineers had the tying run in scoring position with nobody out.

Crespo's double proved to be the first of four-straight hits for the Apps to close out the game. After Crespo, Noah Holmes (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) drilled a line drive off Hatcher's leg that brought Burris home from third with Appalachian's seventh run, moved Crespo to third with the tying run and put Holmes aboard as the winning run.

Three pitches later, Will Callaway (Greenville, S.C./Eastside) tied it at 8-8 with an RBI single to center field. That set up Dobson, who ripped the first pitch he saw from Hatcher into the right-center field gap. Holmes easily scored the winning run from second as Dobson's first-career walk-off hit bounced off the wall in right-center.

Springs (3-3) earned his third win of the season by keeping the Catamounts' high-powered offense off the scoreboard in the eighth and ninth innings. Hatcher, who has 14 saves and six wins on the campaign, suffered the loss to fall to 6-3.

Offensively, Crespo, Callaway, Dobson and Preston Troutman (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) had two hits apiece to pace the Mountaineers' 11-hit attack. Seven of the Apps' 11 hits came in the final three innings.

Crespo led Appalachian with three RBI and Callaway extended his hitting streak to 25 games

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with a leadoff single in the eighth inning. Callaway's 25-game hitting streak is tied with Tommy Green (1988) for the second-longest in Appalachian State history, just two shy of the school-record 27-game streak compiled by Rand Smith in 2009.

Dykota Spiess led 29th-ranked WCU with three hits and Adam Martin drove in half of the Catamounts' eight runs with a fifth-inning grand slam.

**NOTES:** Appalachian State now owns six wins over nationally ranked teams since the beginning of last season ... prior to the 2012 campaign, Appalachian had just one victory over a ranked club since 1982 (a 7-5 win at No. 20 Miami (Fla.) on Feb. 25, 2011) ... the loss snapped Western Carolina's 11-game overall winning streak and a 16-game winning streak in SoCon games ... the Catamounts' last SoCon loss was a 9-2 setback at Furman on April 5 ... Hatcher sports a 15.43 ERA and .514 opponents' batting average in six career appearances against the Mountaineers ... Appalachian State honored its six seniors (Callaway, Crespo, Gabe Dimock (Greensboro, N.C./Grimsley), Tyler Jackson (Jonesville, N.C./Starmount), Rob Marcello (Royal Palm Beach, Fla./Royal Palm Beach) and Josh Wilson (Edgefield, S.C./Strom Thurmond)) and three spring-semester graduates (Callaway, Dimock and Tyler Moore (Banner Elk, N.C./Watauga) prior to the final home game of the season ... Appalachian also recognized Western Carolina's seven seniors as part of the pregame festivities.

**Photo Courtesy: Dillon Dobson, ASU Athletics**