Written by MIke Kelly
Saturday, 06 February 2010 13:02

The Appalachian State men's basketball team continued its Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality on Saturday in Cullowhee, NC.

And the Mountaineers (13-10 overall; 7-4 in the North Division of the Southern Conference) came charging back from an embarrassing loss Monday night against King College, an NAIA school, to beat Western Carolina 89-77 in first-place showdown at the Ramsey Center. The second largest crowd in school history, 6,024, was in attendance.

The win pulls ASU within one-half game of first place in the North Division with a game in hand; and it also gives the Mountaineers the season sweep and the tie-breaker against the Catamounts (18-6; 8-4).

"If I could explain this team, I would write a book about it," said ASU coach Buzz Peterson. "Our guys have a bad tendency to play at the level of their competition. Today, we were sky high against a very good opponent. Monday (against King College) were very low.

"But I'll take the blame for it. I shouldn't have scheduled that game. But it's behind us. The main thing is, we won a huge conference game today thanks to a great effort by our guys."

Donald Sims, who was woeful from the field in his last two outings (against King and Chattanooga), was 8-11 from the field and 9-9 from the free-throw line and led four players in double figures with 29 points. Ike Butts came through with his best performance since the Davidson game and just missed a double-double. He finished with 14 points and nine rebounds. Josh Hunter (four rebounds) and Marcus Wright each poured in ten points. Appalachian's inside game also produced 40 points.

"It just goes to show the character of this team," said Sims. "This the high of all highs. We came together, and we beat a great team in Western. We showed our poise in this game, and we have the veterans and the leaders to win a game like this.

"We just executed our game plan and we took a big step in winning a (division) championship."

ASU turned the tables on Western late in the first half. Trailing by 11, the Mountaineers put together a 16-0 run and grabbed a two-point lead, 36-34, at the break.

"Western Carolina will come at you all the time," said Butts. "They are a very physical team, but I always feel it plays to our advantage because we have the size and the strength inside. Winning this game is huge confidence booster. We just punched them right in the face."

The Apps shot 60% from the floor, and they were 24-28 at the foul line. Defensively, they shut down the Catamounts in the second half, especially at the three-point stripe. The Catamounts, were a woeful 4-14 in the second half, and they only made seven of 7 of 13 free-throws for the game.

Brandon Giles and Jake Robinson led WCU with 19 points each.

"We just went back to the basics after that loss Monday night," Peterson said. "I wasn't concerned about our offense. I just wanted to firm things up defensively. We need to stop people, and we made some big stops today in the second half."

ASU led 74-71 with 3:14 left. But an 11-2 run gave ASU its biggest lead at 85-73 with 1:01 to go. Western never got any closer than nine the rest of the way.

"We have to bring it every night," said Butts. "Coach (Peterson) has been preaching that all week. We need to carry this over to our next game (Monday night at UNC-Greensboro). It's what we have to do, if we want to win a championship."

The Apps wrap-up this four-game road swing Monday night at UNCG. Our coverage begins at 6:15 pm on WATA 1450 AM.

NOTES: ASU coach Buzz Peterson is 12-0 lifetime v. WCU, 5-0 in Cullowhee.....David Jackson, the voice of the Mountaineers, announced Friday that the ISP Sports Network will carry the entire SoCon men's tournament from Charlotte this year. And you will hear every game on WATA Radio in Boone.....The ASU women won their sixth in a row Saturday afternoon as they knocked off Elon 73-54 at Alumni Gym. Courtney Freeman turned in her first career double-double with 11 points and 13 boards. Chakeitha Weldon finished with 16 points to lead ASU in scoring. The ASU women (13-9 overall; 9-4 SoCon) return home to play WCU Monday night.