The Appalachian State men's basketball team took a serious step towards clinching the North Division championship in the Southern Conference Saturday night at the Holmes Center.

The Mountaineers (16-10 overall; 10-4 in the Southern Conference), riding a four-game winning streak, smashed Georgia Southern 111-83, and in the process also tied a school record for most points against a conference opponent. ASU, which led 57-54 at the break, turned up its defensive intensity in the second half and outscored Georgia Southern, which is winless on the road (0-15) this season.

"We just needed to make stops," said ASU coach Buzz Peterson. "This team (Georgia Southern) is very athletic, and they're capable of doing a lot of things out there. They showed that in the first half. But I'm proud of the way our guys responded."

The win gives ASU a two-game lead on Western Carolina (which lost to Davidson, 75-72) for first place in the North Division with four games to play. And the Apps also clinched a first-round bye in SoCon tournament (because Furman beat Chattanooga, 87-78), which begins March 5 in Charlotte.

And the 111 points fell just two points shy of Appalachian's season-high 113-point effort against Milligan College back in December.

Donald Sims led the way with another stellar performance. The junior, who was the SoCon Player of the Week last week, made a strong argument to win the award again this week (and for the third time this season) as he poured in a game-high 30 points. Sims, who also had five rebounds, was 11-14 from the floor. In all, the Apps had four players in double figures.

"We're just having a lot of fun right now, Sims said. "We're just playing with a lot of confidence."

Kellen Brand had 17 points; Ike Butts, who was in foul trouble most of the night, finished with 12 points and six rebounds; Andre Williamson had 11 points and five boards; Ryann Abraham had eight points and five assists.

Team-wise, ASU shot a sizzling 67% from the floor (39-58), made 28-32 free throws, and they outrebounded Georgia Southern by the whopping margin of 39-17. The loss also avenged a disappointing loss against the Eagles in Statesboro last month.

"Revenge never crossed my mind," said Peterson. "But I'm sure the guys remember those early practices. We've come a long way. We've gone through a lot of ups and downs together. But these guys are real hungry right now, and it's our job as coaches to keep them that way."

A win Wednesday night at College of Charleston will give ASU the North Division title. Our coverage on Wednesday begins at 6:15 pm on WATA 1450 AM.