Written by Mike Kelly
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The Appalachian State men's basketball team closed out regular-season play in strong fashion on Saturday.

The Mountaineers (20-11 overall; 13-5 in the Southern Conference and North Division champions) led from wire-to-wire and belted Samford 82-68 on Senior Day at the Holmes Convocation Center. It was also Appalachian's fifth win in a row at home, and it came in front of 2,120 fans on a snowy day in Boone.

Junior Donald Sims, who came off the bench on Senior Day, finished with a game-high 25 points on 8-14 shooting. Sims is averaging 25 points an outing in his last seven games. And the effort on Saturday could give Sims Player of the Year honors in the SoCon. But Sims says there's bigger fish to fry.

"It's nice to be appreciated by the fans and all," he said. "That's a big reason why I play, But the important thing is that we won this game. But it was a bittersweet day. Saying good-bye to our seniors is tough, but we sent them off on a good note."

And the next goal is to win the SoCon tournament down in Charlotte. The tournament begins next Friday; the Apps don't play until next Saturday night at 7 pm.

"We'll take a couple of days off, and then we'll go at it hard." said ASU coach Buzz Peterson. "And I am so proud of these guys. This season had its struggles, but these guys stuck with it.

"All the hard work has paid off, and like I wrote on the board in our locker room, 'We're not done yet.' and we're not. Our goal is to win the tournament and get to the NCAA tournament."

Where the Mountaineers haven't been since 2000.

"But we feel confident about our chances," Sims said. "We're the hottest team in the league right now. And we will win this tournament in practice this week."

Senior Kellen Brand, playing his final home game as a Mountaineer, finished with 18 points. Jeremy Booth had another strong performance with 15 points and four threes.

Josh Hunter, who sang the national anthem before the game, had eight points, five rebounds and three steals. Ike Butts finished with eight points and seven rebounds.

"We accomplished our goal," said senior Tyler Webb. "Coach really wanted us to win this game. He wanted us to maintain our confidence and momentum going into Charlotte next week. We're anxious to get there."

NOTES: ASU will provide a bus trip to the SoCon tournament next Saturday night. The fee for the trip will also include a ticket for the game. The bus will board at the Highland Commons Shopping Center on Highway 105 at 4 pm next Saturday with a return trip home following the game. Seats are limited, so for reservations, please call the ASU ticket office at 1828-262-2079. The deadline to sign up is 4 pm Monday.