

UPDATED: Mountaineers win sixth consecutive SoCon title

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 13 November 2010 18:46

A champion is defined as someone who fights to defend a cause; a warrior.

Well, the Appalachian State football team, which suffered its first Southern Conference loss in more than three years (snapping a 26-game winning streak), reared its ugly head Saturday afternoon and crushed Wofford College 43-13 at Kidd Brewer Stadium on Senior Day. A crowd of 28,622 was on hand to see the lopsided affair.

The win also gives ASU (9-1 overall; 7-1 SoCon) its sixth consecutive SoCon championship, tying a league record set by Georgia Southern (from 1997-2002). It was also Appalachian's 11th SoCon title (leaving the Mountaineers just one shy of Furman, the all-time leader with 12), and its ninth championship under the guidance of head coach Jerry Moore. The win also gives ASU an automatic bid to the FCS playoffs, which begin November 27.

"I am so proud of these players," said ASU coach Jerry Moore. "It's like life. You run into adversity (after last week's loss), so how are you going to react? Turnovers were big in this game, and playing option teams in back-to-back games really helped. We adjusted very well defensively. But this was a big test for us. And it turned out good."

How dominating were the Mountaineers? Well, they built a commanding 24-0 lead at the intermission, and they held Wofford (8-2; 6-1 SoCon), which led both the FCS and FBS Division (averaging 326.1 yards) in rushing this season, to the meager total of 35 rushing yards in the first half, and only 189 yards for the game.

On the other hand, ASU running back Devon Moore, who has had a quiet season for the most part, turned in his best effort of the year and scored three times.

"Devon Moore has been through the big games," said coach Moore. "He's had a quiet season, but he's battled injuries and we're five deep at running back, so he hasn't had a lot of opportunities. But he knows what to do, and what to expect in big games like this."

Moore finished with 115 yards on 17 carries. And the Mountaineers, who broke the game open with a 17-point blitz in the second quarter, racked up 360 offensive yards. ASU scored a pair of touchdowns during a 52-second span late in the second quarter to put the contest basically out of reach.

"It's been a while to get back to where I was last year," Devon Moore said. "The injuries early in the year slowed me up. I missed a lot of practice time. But it feels good, especially to win the conference title today."

"We focused on this game as soon as we got on the bus last week (after the loss against Georgia Southern). This was our best all-around performance of the year. We're starting to peak at the right time."

DeAndre Presley, who threw a pair of interceptions in the loss to Georgia Southern last week, hooked up with Brian Quick on a six-yard scoring toss, capping off a 12-play, 70-yard drive that took nearly six minutes off the clock for a 17-0 lead. Brad Hardee then made a huge play on special teams on the ensuing kick-off.

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He stripped the ball away from Mike Rucker, and Patrick Blaylock recovered at the Terriers 18-yard-line. Moore scored three plays later on a five-yard run, giving ASU its 24-point, halftime advantage. Presley was 17-26 for 192 yards with a pair of touchdown passes.

He hooked up with wide receiver Brian Quick on both those tosses. Quick finished with five catches for 73 yards, and he's caught seven touchdown passes in his career against the Terriers.

"It was great to win this one in front of our home fans after that loss last week," Presley said.

"We had confidence that we could move the ball on these guys. We did a good job taking advantage of our chances."

Defensively, ASU also did a great job smothering Wofford running back Eric Breitenstein.

The red-shirt sophomore, who played at nearby Watauga High School, and leads the nation in scoring and leads the SoCon in rushing, was held to just 35-rushing yards in the first half. For the game, Breitenstein finished with 43 yards on 17 carries. As a team, the Terriers were held to 275 yards-----125 yards below their average.

A pair of Wofford fumbles early in the third quarter led to a pair of ASU scores. The first one resulted in a 34-yard scoring pass from Presley to Quick, the other led to Moore's third touchdown on a ten-yard run, which gave ASU an insurmountable 38-0 advantage. In all, the Terriers turned it over four times, and the Mountaineers scored 21 points off those turnovers.

"They have a great team," said defensive lineman Bobby Bozzo, "It's a personal vendetta against Wofford because when they came in here in 2008, they were yelling 'over-rated.' That really spiced up this rivalry. I love winning the conference championship, but there's still a long way to go.

"I want to extend my senior year as long as possible. It's nice to beat these guys and to win the conference title, but now we have to move on."

Wofford finally got on the board following a Presley interception in the third quarter. That led to a 30-yard scoring pass from Brian Kass to Brendan Bersin with 1:38 left in the period. Kass later scored on a five-yard run in the fourth quarter. But rubbing salt in the wound, following Kass' score, Chris Aiken blocked the extra point and Troy Sanders returned it for a two point conversion the other way.

"Now we start a new season," Moore said. "Winning six titles in a row in any conference is huge. But now we have to focus on finishing strong and getting ready for the playoffs. Offense, defense, special teams, we played very well today. It all came together for us."

Up next, the Mountaineers travel to Gainesville to play the Florida Gators in the regular-season finale next Saturday. And then it's off to the playoffs.

"And we're going down there to win, just like we did against Michigan and LSU," Moore said.

"Sure, they'll throw our Michigan win (in 2007) at their players, but we'll prepare for it and be ready for that game next week."

Our coverage of that game begins at 10:30 am next Saturday on AM 1450, WATA.

NOTES: Place-kicker Jason Vitaris of the Mountaineers booted two field goals. The first one, at that time, a season-best 39 yarder in the second quarter. He followed that up with a career-best 50-yard field goal in the final stanza. His previous best was 49 yards....The Mountaineers own a 17-10 series lead against the Terriers. They've also won three in a row against Wofford College. The Terriers haven't beaten ASU since 2007. and lifetime, the Terriers are 2-12 at Kidd Brewer Stadium.....Th the Mountaineers are all but assured of a bye in the first round of the upcoming NCAA Division I Football Championship and likely sewed up a top-two seed and homefield advantage through the national semifinals with Saturday's win ...Apps have now scored 113

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Wofford 0 0 7 6 **13**

ASU 7 17 14 5 **43**

Scoring:

1st QTR:

ASU - Moore 11 yd run (Vitaris kick), 7-0

2nd QTR:

ASU - Vitaris 39 yd field goal, 10-0

ASU - Quick 6 yd pass from Presley (Vitaris kick), 17-0

ASU - Moore 5 yd run (Vitaris kick), 24-0

3rd QTR:

ASU - Quick 34 yd pass from Presley (Vitaris kick), 31-0

ASU - Moore 10 yd run (Vitaris kick), 38-0

WOF - Bersin 30 yd pass from Kass (Reed kick), 38-7

4th QTR:

ASU - Vitaris 50 yd field goal, 9-49 4:11 41-7

WOF - Kass 5 yd run (kick blocked), 41-13

ASU - Sanders PAT return 43-13

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Team Statistics:

FIRST DOWNS: WOFFORD 17, ASU 18

RUSHING YARDS: WOFFORD 189, ASU 168

PASSING YARDS: WOFFORD 86, ASU 192

TOTAL OFFENSE YARDS: WOFFORD 275, ASU 360

PENALTY YARDS: WOFFORD 2-10, ASU 6-57

POSSESSION TIME: WOFFORD 31:17, ASU 28:43

THIRD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WOFFORD 7 of 16, ASU 7 of 13

FOURTH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WOFFORD 2 of 3, ASU 0 of 0

TURNOVERS: WOFFORD 4, ASU 1

ASU:

RUSHING: MOORE 17-115 3 TD

PASSING: PRESLEY 17-26 192 1 I-2 TD, JORDEN 5-48

RECEIVING: QUICK 5-73 2 TD

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WOFFORD:

RUSHING: KASS 11-49, BREITENSTEIN 17-43

PASSING: KASS 4-11 86 1 TD

RECEIVING: BERSIN 2-47 1 TD

1 2 3 4 Total