

WCU's 10-Run Fifth Dooms ASU

Written by Mike Flynn
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Western Carolina scored 10 runs in the top of the fifth inning to erase Appalachian State University baseball's 7-2 lead and hand the Mountaineers a 13-7 loss on Monday afternoon at Beaver Field at Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium.

With the setback, Appalachian (28-20, 12-12 SoCon) fell one win short of recording its first-ever three-game series sweep over archrival WCU (18-26-1, 8-16). Despite the loss, ASU remains in sixth place in the Southern Conference while Western climbed out of last place in the league standings and into a three-way tie with The Citadel and Wofford for the eighth and final spot in the upcoming SoCon Tournament. Two conference weekends remain before the league tournament, which begins on May 25 in Charleston, S.C.

Like they had in the first two games of this weekend's series, the Mountaineers burst out of the gates again on Monday, scoring two runs in the first and second innings and three in the fourth to grab an early 7-2 advantage.

However, the long bottom half of the fourth inning may have ultimately been ASU's undoing, as starting pitcher Seth Grant (Etowah, N.C./West Henderson) had to make two trips to the bullpen to stay loose during the stanza while nine Mountaineers went to the plate and the Catamounts made two pitching changes.

When Grant returned to the mound in the top of the fifth, he allowed six of the first seven batters he faced to reach base and surrendered a three-run triple to Macon Smith and a three-run home run to Stephen Notaro that turned Appalachian's 7-2 lead into an 8-7 deficit. Tyler White followed Notaro's homer with a single that chased Grant (4-6) from the game but ASU reliever Ryne Frankoff (Apex, N.C./Apex) didn't fare much better, as he surrendered four more hits and was charged with three runs before the Mountaineers finally got out of the disastrous frame. In all, WCU sent 14 batters to the plate in the 10-run fifth, banging out eight hits in the process, including three doubles, a triple and a home run.

Western tacked on another run in the top of the sixth to account for the final margin.

All five of ASU's hits came in the first four innings. WCU reliever Andrew Chilcoat (1-0) turned in the series' best pitching performance with 4.1 innings of hitless relief. The right-hander was dominant despite striking out only two and throwing less than half of his 55 pitches for strikes (27-of-55).

Trey Holmes (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) and Zack Briggs (Lexington, N.C./Central Davidson) drove in two runs apiece for the Mountaineers and Jack Myers (Charlotte, N.C./Myers Park) extended his hitting streak to 18 games with an RBI single in the fourth inning. However, Hector Crespo (Miami, Fla./Florida Christian) saw his 12-game hitting streak come to an end with an 0-for-2 afternoon but scored twice after drawing walks in his first two plate appearances.

Smith, Notaro and Ross Heffley (who homered twice) each had three RBI for Western Carolina. Appalachian closes a seven-game homestand on Wednesday night when it hosts High Point. First pitch is set for 6 p.m. at Smith Stadium.