

ASU Drops 2-1 Decision In Season Opener

Written by Mike Flynn

Saturday, 18 February 2012 12:42

George Mason broke a 1-1 tie with a two-out RBI single in the bottom of the eighth inning and handed Appalachian State University baseball a 2-1 season-opening defeat on Friday evening at Elon's Latham Park. Thanks to outstanding starting pitching from Appalachian's Seth Grant (Etowah, N.C./West Henderson) and George Mason's Anthony Montefusco, Friday's season opener was knotted at 1-1 after seven-and-a-half innings. GMU's Mick Foley opened the bottom of the eighth with a single up the middle off ASU reliever Josh Wilson (Edgefield, S.C./Strom Thurmond) and moved

into scoring position on a sacrifice bunt by Jake Leonardo.

Wilson appeared to be on his way to working out of the jam when he struck the Patriots' No. 9 hitter Nick Allen out on three pitches but GMU leadoff man Chris Cook followed the big strikeout by roping a 2-0 pitch into left field. With Foley being waved around third, Mountaineer left fielder Preston Troutman (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) cleanly fielded the hard-hit single and made a strong throw that beat Foley to the plate. However, the throw pulled ASU catcher Jeremy Dowdy (Raleigh, N.C./Wakefield) up the first-base line just enough to allow Foley to make a terrific slide to the third-base side of the plate and barely avoid Dowdy's tag.

Dowdy kept hopes alive for Appalachian (0-1) when he laced a one-out single into center field in the top of the ninth inning but Trey Holmes (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) followed with a game-ending double play.

Despite suffering its first season-opening loss in four years, ASU had a lot to be encouraged by in the narrow defeat, particularly the performance turned in by Grant on the mound. The senior kept GMU hitters off-balance all day, striking out eight (the second-highest total of his career), walking none and allowing just three hits in six strong innings, good for the longest opening-day outing in eight seasons under head coach Chris Pollard.

The only run that the Patriots managed against Grant was an unearned tally in the fourth when Mountaineer right fielder Tyler Tewell (Charlotte, N.C./Butler) dropped the ball when trying to exchange it from his glove to his throwing hand on a shallow flyout, allowing the first run of the game to score from third base.

Appalachian managed its only run in the sixth when shortstop Will Callaway (Greenville, S.C./Eastside) reached on an infield single, stole second and scored easily on Daniel Kassouf's (Lexington, N.C./North Davidson) RBI single to right center field.

Callaway recorded two of ASU's seven hits, stole two bases and made the defensive play of the game in the he gunned a runner down that was attempting to advance from second to third on a grounder to Callaway at shortstop.

Like Grant, Montefusco did not figure in the decision despite a sterling start on the mound.

George Mason's Jake Kalish worked two perfect innings to pick up the win while Wilson suffered the loss for Appalachian. Chris O'Brady worked around Dowdy's ninth-inning single to record the save for George Mason (1-0).

Instead of playing single games versus Akron (0-1) on Saturday and Sunday as originally scheduled, Appalachian will now play a doubleheader against the Zips on Saturday due to a forecast for inclement weather on Sunday. Saturday's twinbill is set for 4 p.m. at Latham Park.

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Photo Courtesy: Seth Grant, by Dave Mayo, ASU Athletics