

Neal Powers Mountaineers Past Cougars

Written by Charles Cochrum
Friday, 02 March 2012 15:07

Mike Neal's game-high 21 points and a strong performance by a trio of seniors powered Appalachian State University men's basketball past College of Charleston, 93-81, in the first round of the Southern Conference Basketball Championship on Friday afternoon. ASU squares off with

UNCG on Saturday at noon in the quarterfinal round. The Mountaineers (13-17) put together perhaps their best offensive performance of the season, connecting on 53.1 percent (34-for-64) of their shots from the floor including 8-of-15 from beyond the arc to knock off the No. 4 seeded Cougars (19-12). ASU's 93 points were the team's highest total of the season, as was the 53.5 percent mark from downtown and 60 second-half points.

After a slow start to the game, ASU battled back from a modest four-point deficit to open up a seven-point lead before the Cougars cut the deficit to 33-30 at the intermission. CofC pulled even three times early in the second half before the Mountaineers took off on a 19-7 run to open a 69-53 lead with six minutes remaining in regulation. ASU led by as many as 18 before the Cougars began to make a comeback.

An outstanding performance by Andrew Lawrence pulled the South's four-seed back within eight points with 1:43, but ASU's free-throw shooting and solid press-breaking offense sealed the 12-point win. Lawrence finished with 16 points, four assists and two steals for the Cougars. Senior Omar Carter added 19 points with five rebounds, two assists and a steal. Classmate Andre Williamson added 10 points on 5-of-11 shooting with 15 rebounds and a pair of blocks to record his fifth double-double of the season.

Center Isaac Butts added 11 points and 14 rebounds in 33 minutes on the floor. Tab Hamiton scored 17 points on 6-of-10 shooting with three treys. The guard swiped three of ASU's five steals.

Butts and Williamson hauled in 29 of ASU's 50 rebounds and the squad limited Charleston to just 31 rebounds on the day. Appalachian converted 17 offensive boards into 24 second-chance points. The Apps scored 18 fast-break points, just four shy of the season high, and added 44 points in the paint.

To nitpick the outstanding performance, ASU committed 12 turnovers in the first half, which led directly to 14 of the Cougars' points in the opening 20 minutes. The Apps took better care of the ball in the second half with just five miscues after the intermission.

In addition to Lawrence, three other Charleston players scored in double figures, as Trent Wiedeman notched 19, Antwaine Wiggins added 16 and Anthony Stitt scored 14 off the bench. ASU's Saturday quarterfinal against North division champion UNCG will be broadcast online on ESPN3. The contest will be followed by Wofford against The Citadel or Western Carolina, with the games' winners advancing to Sunday's 6 p.m. semifinal.

NOTES: ASU's previous season scoring high was 90 points against Lees-McRae on Nov. 11 ... Neal's 21 points were the most by a Mountaineer since Kellen Brand's program tournament record 37 points in the team's 77-54 win against CofC in the 2010 semifinal ... ASU's 93 points were the most in a SoCon Tournament game since the team scored 94 in a double-overtime win against Chattanooga in 1999 ... the program tournament record is 100 (vs. VMI, 1991).

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ASU 93, CofC 81

Score by periods 1st 2nd Total

Appalachian State..33 60 93

Charleston.....30 51 81

ASU: CARTER 19, WILLIAMSON 10 (15 REBOUNDS), BUTTS 11 (14 REBOUNDS), HAMILTON 17, NEAL 21, HEALY 7, TRICE 3, WOODS 5. FG: 34-64, 3FG: 8-15, FT: 17-24. 50 REBOUNDS, 17 TURNOVERS, 13 ASSISTS.

CofC: BARU 6 (8 REBOUNDS), WIGGINS 16, WIEDEMAN 19 (7 REBOUNDS), LAWRENCE 16 (4 ASSISTS), JOHNSON 9, SUNDBERG 1, STITT 14. FG: 33-76, 3FG: 6-24, FT: 9-17. 31 REBOUNDS, 6 TURNOVERS, 11 ASSISTS.

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Photo Courtesy: Mike Neal, by Dave Mayo, ASU Athletics