

Southern Conference Reverses Men's Tennis Result

Written by Paul Blascovich
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Southern Conference officials have overturned the result of Thursday's men's tennis match between Appalachian State University and Furman, as announced by assistant commissioner for championships Brandon Neff on Friday. After the Mountaineers handed the Paladins a 4-3 defeat, FU coaches

protested the decision. SoCon officials have upheld the FU appeal, and Thursday's result has officially been declared a 3-3 tie.

First-year head coach Kelly Jones claimed that Appalachian State University did not adhere to ITA guidelines in ranking its singles line-up in order of ability. Appalachian's change was necessitated by an injury at the No. 4 position.

As a result of the committee's decision, ASU's win in the No. 6 match was declared a "no contest," deducting one point from ASU's team score.

Furman's protest was filed after the team departed with the loss. FU coaches did not raise objection to the lineup change prior to the match, even after receiving ASU's proposed singles lineup. The result of the decision will not impact Appalachian's seeding in the upcoming Southern Conference Tournament. Any tie between ASU and FU would be broken by total team match points; Furman cannot catch ASU even with a 7-0 win over Wofford and a 0-7 loss by ASU to College of Charleston on Friday.

Furman will likely finish as the league's No. 4 seed and will still face No. 5 UNCG in the quarterfinal round.

With the tie, the Mountaineers still snapped a 16-year losing streak to the Paladins.

Mountaineers Hand CofC First SoCon Loss

In the team's final match of the regular season, Appalachian State University men's tennis stunned the Southern Conference with a 5-2 win over league rival College of Charleston at ASU Tennis Courts on Friday. The Mountaineers (14-5-1, 7-2-1 SoCon) are now set to enter the postseason on a high note by handing the visiting Cougars (14-4, 8-1 SoCon) their first

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conference loss of the year. With the win, Appalachian State picks up its seventh SoCon victory, matching last season's total for the most league wins in head coach Bob Lake's 12-season career. This year's conference winning percentage (.750) is the team's highest during Lake's tenure.

In addition, the Mountaineers have secured the No. 3 seed in next week's Southern Conference tournament, marking the team's best berth since the inception of the current team tournament format in 1998. Prior to Friday's match, Appalachian seniors Alain Humblet, Philip Kloc and Alex Markov were recognized for their contributions to the ASU men's tennis program.

On Friday, College of Charleston stole the first doubles match, picking up an 8-5 win in the No. 1 position. Appalachian's No. 3 pair of redshirt junior Steve Karendal and junior Andrew McKinnon took a quick lead, opening a 5-1 lead in their doubles match, and the Mountaineers won their final three games in an 8-2 win to tie the pairs competition.

In the No. 2 match, Mountaineer seniors Humblet and Markov broke serve in the opening game of the match and held the lead to a 7-6 advantage. While the Apps served for the match, the Cougars duo rallied to tie the match and force a tiebreaker. The extra points saw Humblet and Markov pick up a 4-2 lead at the court change, and the Black and Gold held on for the 9-8(7-4) win to clinch Appalachian's doubles point.

With the conference-leading Cougars trailing, Appalachian's netters kept up the pressure. Sophomore Matt Saltgaver scored four of the last five games of his opening set and accomplished the same feat in the second to win his No. 5 singles match, 6-3, 6-3. Entering the day, his CofC opponent had won seven straight matches and 11 sets in a row prior to his meeting with Saltgaver.

Less than 10 minutes later, Karendal polished off his match with a second-set break point to close out an energetic 6-2, 6-4 triumph at No. 4 singles to put the Mountaineers on top 3-0, one point from winning the team match. College of Charleston put its first point on the board when its No. 3 player pulled out a 6-4, 6-3 win in the No. 3 match.

Appalachian's clinching point came from senior Kloc, who scored a pair of break points in the first set and accumulated a 5-0 lead in the second set to mark a span of seven unanswered games. CofC scored a trio of game points before Kloc closed the door on a 6-3, 6-3 win to hand ASU the team win. Moments after Kloc's win, Appalachian's McKinnon iced a 7-5, 6-4 victory in the No. 6 match. The Mountaineer broke serve three times to close out the lengthy opening set before using an early break point to hold on to the latter set, giving ASU a 5-1 advantage.

In the final match on the courts, senior Markov rebounded from a late break-point and loss in the opening set to equalize the match at a set apiece. The decisive set saw CofC break the opening game, and the Cougar was able to confidently conclude a 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 win for College of Charleston.

With the regular season in the books, Appalachian State now turns its attention to the 2012 Southern Conference Tournament, hosted by College of Charleston and The Citadel, April 19-22. The Mountaineers have a first round bye and will learn their potential quarterfinal opponents when brackets are released early next week.

Photo Courtesy: Philip Kloc, ASU Athletics

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