

Mountaineers' Rally Falls Just Short

Written by Mike Flynn
Monday, 16 April 2012 06:36

Appalachian State University baseball nearly battled all the way back from a late five-run deficit but a bit of bad luck in the first inning proved to be the difference in the Mountaineers' 7-6 loss at Georgia Southern on Sunday afternoon at J.I. Clements Stadium. With the setback, No. 27

Appalachian (25-9, 10-5 SoCon) dropped the three-game Southern Conference series at Georgia Southern (22-16, 10-8 SoCon), two games to one. The series loss dropped ASU into a four-way tie for first-place in the SoCon standings with College of Charleston (25-12, 14-7 SoCon), Elon (21-17, 12-6 SoCon) and Western Carolina (25-11, 10-5 SoCon).

The Mountaineers trailed 7-2 going into the eighth inning but fell inches short of climbing all the way out of the five-run hole. Daniel Kassouf (Lexington, N.C./North Davidson) started the rally with a three-run home run — his SoCon-leading 13th blast of the season — in the top of the eighth that cut the deficit to 7-5. It looked like Appalachian would go down quietly in the ninth when GSU closer Kyle Rowe easily retired the first two batters of the frame. The Mountaineers were down to their final strike when pinch-hitter Preston Troutman (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) beat out an infield single to shortstop on a 2-2 pitch to keep the Apps alive.

Hector Crespo (Miami, Fla./Florida Christian) followed with a single up the middle that put the tying run on base for Tyler Zupcic (Charlotte, N.C./Providence), who yanked an RBI double down the left field line that made it 7-6. Zupcic's double brought Will Callaway (Greenville, S.C./Eastside) to the plate with the tying run just 90 feet away and the go-ahead run in scoring position. Callaway fouled off three-straight pitches from Rowe before roping a sinking line drive into center field. Georgia Southern center fielder Scooter Williams appeared to be fooled by the sinking liner and momentarily froze before going to his knees to catch the ball just before it dropped in for a go-ahead single. The Clements Stadium crowd of 1,251 collectively exhaled as the Eagles' second big break of the afternoon ended the wild ballgame.

Despite the late rally, for all intents and purposes, Sunday's contest was decided in the bottom of the first inning. After Williams drew a leadoff walk, GSU called for a hit-and-run with Williams breaking for second base on a 1-2 pitch to Michael Burruss. Burruss lined the pitch back up the middle, right at Callaway, who was covering second on the steal attempt. However, the Mountaineer shortstop couldn't handle the line drive while moving towards the bag and the ball caromed off his glove and into center field, giving the Eagles runners on first and third with no outs instead of none on with two away.

ASU starter Rob Marcello (Royal Palm Beach, Fla./Royal Palm Beach) followed the tough-luck hit by striking out Eric Phillips but hung a breaking ball to GSU cleanup hitter Chase Griffin, who drilled it midway up the batter's eye in straightaway center field for a three-run homer that put the Mountaineers in a 3-0 hole. Appalachian never pulled even after the misfortune in the first. The Apps got within a run at 3-2 in the top of the fourth when they strung together three-straight two-out hits, capped by back-to-back RBI doubles from Kassouf and Tyler Tewell (Charlotte, N.C./Butler), but GSU scored once in the sixth and three times in the seventh to stretch the advantage to 7-2.

Kassouf led the way for the Mountaineers, going 2-for-4 with a double, home run, two runs scored and four RBI. Crespo also had two hits for ASU. Marcello settled in to retire 14 of the final 20 batters he faced after Griffin's home run in the first but suffered the loss to fall to 4-3 on

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the campaign. After a 1-3 road trip, Appalachian looks to rebound when it returns to the friendly confines of Beaver Field at Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium for a six-game homestand. The stint begins with the opener of a two-game mid-week series versus Eastern Kentucky on Tuesday. First pitch is set for 6 p.m. at Smith Stadium.

Photo Courtesy: Daniel Kassouf, ASU Athletics