

ASU Men's Tennis Dismissed by Samford

Written by Paul Blascovich
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Despite picking up early momentum, Appalachian State University men's tennis fell behind and was unable to recover, as the No. 3 Mountaineers fell to No. 2 Samford, 4-2, in the semifinals of the 2012 Southern Conference Tournament on Saturday.

With the loss, Appalachian (15-7-1) finds its season at an end after posting 15 wins for the

third time in four seasons, while defending-champion Samford (17-4) returns to the championship final for the second-straight time. In doubles action, Appalachian's top pair, sophomore Sebastien King (Montreal, Quebec/George Vanier) and senior Philip Kloc (Melbourne, Australia/Mentone Grammar), broke out a 5-0 lead and improved to 7-2 before Samford rallied to win three straight games to cut the margin to 7-5.

Meanwhile, ASU's No. 2 duo, seniors Alain Humblet (Montreal, Quebec/DE Mortagne) and Alex Markov (Pernik, Bulgaria/Hawai'i Pacific) were unable to pull away from their Bulldog foes as the teams exchanged four breakpoints but remained tied 4-4.

Appalachian caught fire in both of the top two doubles positions, and after just over an hour of play, the two Mountaineer pairs finished their matches within three seconds of each other by an identical 8-5 score. With the doubles-point in hand, ASU carried a 1-0 lead into singles play.

The Black and Gold's No. 3 partnership of Steve Karendal (Kernersville, N.C./Lees-McRae) and Andrew McKinnon (Mooresville, N.C./Lake Norman) trailed 6-7 when ASU clinched the point and play was abandoned.

Finding themselves in a hole, the Bulldogs upped the pressure in the individual matches. With Appalachian still reeling from a lengthy match on Friday, Samford was able to capitalize and win the opening set in four of the six matches.

In the No. 1 match, Markov and his opponent remained on serve until the 10th game, when Samford scored the first break point of the set to earn a 4-6 win. In the second set, the Bulldog was relentless, and Samford leveled the team score with a 6-4, 6-1 victory.

At No. 4, King fell behind after the opening game of the match, and Samford tacked on another break point late in the opener. The second set went much the same way, as King was able to cut a 1-4 deficit to 3-4 but could not fend off a 6-2, 6-3 Bulldog win.

With Samford up 2-0, the Bulldogs remained in control. In the No. 5 match, Appalachian's Karendal broke serve in the first game, but Samford won four straight to turn a 4-2 ASU edge into a set for Samford. Karendal fell behind three times in the second set, getting back on serve after each until Samford broke in the final game of a 6-4, 6-4 win.

The Bulldogs' possessed a 3-1 lead and needed to win one of three remaining matches, all destined for a third and final set.

After playing the hero in Friday's win, sophomore Matt Saltsgaver (Winter Park, Fla./Winter Park) again showcased his fortitude. After picking up the first set and faltering in the second, the all-SoCon Mountaineer powered through the decisive games and earned a 6-2, 4-6, 6-2 victory to keep Appalachian State alive.

At No. 2, Kloc saw a 3-2 first-set lead vanish after Samford scored four games in a row. The Mountaineer collected himself to cruise to a win in the second set but found himself trailing 2-5 in the third. Determined to extend his final season, Kloc dug deep to win four unanswered games and was serving for the match with a 6-5 lead. In the end, Samford broke the App's

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serve and tallied the final four points of the final tiebreaker, earning a 6-3, 2-6, 7-6(7-4) Bulldog win to ice the match.

At No. 3, Humblet won the opening set but trailed 6-4, 4-6, 2-4 when action was halted.

Appalachian State's season comes to an end with this year's Mountaineers in possession of the program's most wins (15) and best league winning percentage (7-2-1, .750) in the 12-year tenure of head coach Bob Lake. The Apps also made their first SoCon semifinal appearance since 2008.

Photo Courtesy: Philip Kloc, ASU Athletics