

ASU Receives NCAA Championship Berth

Written by Mike Flynn
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Southern Conference champion Appalachian State University baseball will continue its storybook season in the 2012 NCAA Division I Baseball Championship, as the Mountaineers received an at-large berth in the 64-team field on Monday. Appalachian (39-16) received the No. 3 seed in the four-team Charlottesville, Va. regional and will play its first NCAA postseason game in 26 years on Friday versus No. 2-seeded Oklahoma (38-22). Host and top seed Virginia (38-17-1) and fourth-seeded Army (41-13) round out the regional field. The regional bid is Appalachian's first since 1986, when the Mountaineers became the first SoCon squad to ever receive an at-large berth in the NCAA Championship field. This year's regional appearance is Appalachian's fourth overall — the Apps also made the field in 1973 and 1984 in addition to the at-large berth in '86. ASU is 2-6 in its three NCAA postseason appearances.

Oklahoma (38-22) also received an at-large bid after falling just short of winning the Big XII Tournament championship, dropping an 8-7 nailbiter to Missouri on Sunday. The Sooners finished fourth in the Big XII regular-season standings with a 13-10 league record but beat regular-season champion Baylor twice in the conference tournament to reach the championship game.

The NCAA regional is a double-elimination format with the winners and losers of Appalachian-OU and UVa-Army contests meeting on Saturday. The regional champion will be decided on Sunday or Monday (if a winner-takes-all second championship game is necessary). Rounding out the regional field, Virginia finished fourth overall in the Atlantic Coast Conference (second in the Coastal Division) this season and went 2-1 in the round-robin ACC Tournament. UVa was ranked in the Top 25 of all four major college baseball polls at the end of the regular season, topped by a No. 17 ranking from Baseball America. Army (41-13) won both the Patriot League regular-season and conference tournament titles this season. The Black Knights' 41 victories are a school record.

Appalachian won its first SoCon regular-season title since 1987 and is one of three conference teams in the field of 64 (joining regular-season co-champion College of Charleston and tournament-champion Samford). The Mountaineers' 39 victories are just one shy of the school record of 40, set in 1986.

Appalachian State has never faced Oklahoma or Virginia on the baseball diamond but swept two games from Army in 2006 in Davidson, N.C. Game times have yet to be determined and regional action runs through Monday. The winner of the Charlottesville Regional will advance to NCAA Division I super regionals, where it will take on the winner of the Columbia, S.C. Regional in a best-of-three series for a spot in the College World Series.

Photo Courtesy: Chris Pollard, ASU Athletics