

UPDATED: Appalachian Tops Oklahoma, 5-4, in Regional

Written by Mike Flynn
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Ryan Arrowood (Rutherfordton, N.C./R-S Central) took a no-hitter into the seventh inning, the bottom three hitters in Appalachian State University's batting order combined to go 7-for-10 and the Mountaineers' bullpen didn't let a 5-1 ninth-inning lead completely dissipate in Appalachian's 5-4 win over Oklahoma in the opening round of the 2012 NCAA Division I Baseball Championship's Charlottesville Regional on Saturday night at Davenport Field. With its first NCAA postseason victory since 1973, Appalachian (40-16) moves on to play host and top-seeded Virginia (39-17-1) on Sunday at 3 p.m. No. 2-seed Oklahoma (38-23) plays Army (41-14) in an elimination game on Sunday at 11 a.m.

"First off, I'm really proud of our guys," said ASU coach Chris Pollard. "Ryan (Arrowood) pitched an incredible ballgame and really set the tone from the first inning. Our team played a great ballgame defensively and I thought we did a tremendous job with our situational hitting. Every time we got guys on, we were able to push them around and every time we got guys on third base, we were able to figure out a way to get them home. I thought we competed really, really good. I also thought that that was a very good club we faced. Jordan John was one of the best arms we've seen in the past couple years...maybe the best changeup we've seen while I've been at Appalachian. He's a guy that has a bright future ahead of him along with [Arrowood]. But it was a really good game. I thought we did enough there to survive, but it really boils down to Ryan Arrowood setting the tone with a tremendous start."

Arrowood was the hero of the Mountaineers' first regional triumph in 14,252 days. The right-handed senior had his no-hitter broken up on Caleb Bushyhead's single up the middle with one out in the seventh and left the ballgame after Evan Mistach singled through the left side with two outs in the bottom of the eighth to plate the only run the Sooners would manage against Arrowood and cut the Mountaineer lead to 3-1.

Oklahoma only managed two real threats in 7.2 innings against Arrowood and sterling defensive plays squelched both opportunities. With the Mountaineers up 2-0 in the sixth, Arrowood hit two batters to put the tying run on base with one out and all-Big XII center fielder Max White coming to the plate. White ripped a 2-1 pitch into left field but Preston Troutman (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) made a spectacular running catch just a few feet in front of the left-field wall then turned and fired the ball back into the infield to keep the runners on first and second. Two pitches later, Mistach grounded out to keep the 2-0 lead and no-hitter intact.

Appalachian extended the lead to 3-0 on a sacrifice fly by Daniel Kassouf (Lexington, N.C./North Davidson) in the top of the eighth and it looked as though Arrowood would cruise through the bottom of the frame when he retired the first two batters. But with well over 120 pitches on his ledger, Arrowood issued a pair of two-out walks, pushing his pitch count to 137 and forcing head coach Chris Pollard to remove his senior ace, who walked off the field to a standing ovation from the crowd of 2,804.

Closer Nathan Hyatt (Brevard, N.C./Brevard) replaced Arrowood and got Jack Mayfield to hit a soft fly ball into shallow right field. It looked as though the looper might fall in for a hit but right fielder Tyler Tewell (Charlotte, N.C./Butler) made a terrific sliding catch in fair territory, his momentum carrying him into the ASU bullpen with the Apps' 3-1 lead still intact.

Appalachian tacked on a pair of insurance runs in the top of the ninth to take a seemingly safe 5-1 lead. Seniors Jeremy Dowdy (Raleigh, N.C./Wakefield) and Trey Holmes (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) led off the stanza with back-to-back doubles down the right-field line to stretch the lead to 4-1 and Holmes came home on his brother Noah's sacrifice fly to center field

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to make it 5-1.

It turned out that the Mountaineers would need every bit of the insurance in the bottom of the ninth. Hyatt, Appalachian's single-season record-holder with 15 saves on the campaign, threw 11-straight balls to open the frame and loaded the bases on a pair of walks and a hit batter. Hyatt was removed from the game when he balked in a run that cut the Mountaineer advantage to 5-2.

Ryne Frankoff (Apex, N.C./Apex) replaced Hyatt and allowed an RBI groundout and a run-scoring wild pitch to cut the ASU lead to 5-4. After striking out OU leadoff hitter Erik Ross for the second out of the inning, Frankoff walked Cody Reine to bring White to the plate as the winning run. However, on a 1-1 pitch, Frankoff induced a lazy fly ball to right field that Tewell hauled in for the final out.

"It wasn't a hard decision taking him out," Pollard said. "The hard decision has been whether to use Nate in the eighth or not. His best production has been when we bring him in in the ninth and exclusively in the ninth. What has been hard for him has been when he has to come over and sit...the longer the inning the harder it is for him to get loose when he comes back out. As great as a job as he has done in the closer role, we have to put him in the best position to be successful and the best position may be staying exclusively with the ninth inning."

"We have to tip our cap to Appalachian State. I've been in that position," said Oklahoma coach Sonny Golloway. I talked to their coach about getting to that first regional and how difficult it is. That's their first win in a regional in a long time so you have to commend them. More importantly, I think the way [Ryan] Arrowood pitched was outstanding. He was really moving right along. The game was going really quickly. I didn't think his pitch count was near what it ended up being. We thought that if we could keep it close, it would be tough to finish it off because I had been in that position before when I was at Oral Roberts University. When you're trying to get that first win at a regional for the first time, it can be very difficult, but if you look at the end [of the game], we just didn't keep it close enough. It was tough for them to finish it off but give them credit. They were able to do it."

Despite the late drama, the story of the day was Arrowood. He wound up allowing just one run on two hits over 7.2 innings, walking three and striking out nine. In the process, he moved to 11-0 on the season and became Appalachian's all-time leader in single-season (93) and career (252) strikeouts. Trey Holmes (3-for-4, RBI, two runs), Troutman (2-for-3, sacrifice bunt) and Noah Holmes (2-for-3, two RBI, run) — Appalachian's No. 7, 8 and 9 hitters — led the Mountaineers' 10-hit attack off Oklahoma ace Jordan John (8-7).

"The one thing about [Jordan] John is he is very tough against right-handers," Pollard said. "Because of his change-up, which is one of the best I've seen since I came back to Division I baseball, it makes him really difficult for right-handers to pick up. Our left-handers thought they were seeing the ball really well against him."

NOTES: Appalachian's last NCAA Tournament win was a 4-3, 10-inning victory over NC State on May 26, 1973 in the District 3 Playoffs in Starkville, Miss. ... Appalachian matched a school record with its 40th win of the season (ASU went 40-13-1 in 1986) ... the Mountaineers moved to 5-2 this season against teams from Bowl Championship Series "power conferences" ... the win over No. 23 Oklahoma was Appalachian's third of the season over a nationally ranked team ... prior to this season, the Mountaineers only had one win over a nationally ranked opponent since 1982 ... with his 11th victory, Arrowood extended his own school record with his 28th career victory ... Arrowood also set a new single-season ASU record with 99.1 innings pitched on the season ... Dowdy became the third player in Appalachian history to play in 200 games,

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joining former teammates Wes Hobson and David Towarnicky (2007-10) ... the save was the first of Frankoff's career ... Appalachian played a game in the month of June for the first time in school history.

Photo Courtesy: Ryan Arrowood, ASU Athletics