

ECU Pulls Away Late in Season Opener

Written by Mike Flynn

Saturday, 01 September 2012 18:19

Appalachian State University trailed East Carolina by just one point late in the third quarter but an array of miscues and the sweltering weather took their toll on the Mountaineers down the stretch in a 35-13 loss in Saturday's season opener

at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. Appalachian State (0-1) racked up 419 yards of offense — including 300 passing yards by junior quarterback Jamal Jackson (Atlanta, Ga./North Atlanta)— but surrendered touchdowns on a fumble and kickoff return, allowed a long punt return that set up another score, turned the ball over three times and was penalized 11 times for 100 yards in the hard-fought loss.

"I thought we played hard today," said ASU coach Jerry Moore. "I'm very proud of them. The final score is by no means an indicator of what type of team we could be. I saw a bunch of tough men today that showed me a lot of grit and fight. I believe we have the fixings of being a good football team."

The Mountaineers trailed just 14-13 with 2:35 to go in the third quarter after Drew Stewart (Gastonia, N.C./North Gaston) made his second field goal of the day from 41 yards out. However, East Carolina's Lance Ray returned the ensuing kickoff 90 yards for a game-changing touchdown and Conference USA's Pirates used their superior depth to wear down the Apps from there.

Appalachian held a commanding 332-242 advantage in total yardage through three quarters but was outgained 148-87 in the final period and ECU tacked on a pair of fourth-quarter scores to account for the deceiving final margin.

"The heat finally took its toll on us," said defensive back Troy Sanders, who set up ASU's first touchdown with an interception in the first quarter. "We were so close, but we had a couple of guys go down, and we just wore down in the fourth quarter. But we're a family. This team jells together very well. We feed off each other."

Things couldn't have started out much better for the Mountaineers, who have been slow out of the gates in recent season openers. Sanders, who had ten tackles, (Chester, S.C./Chester) intercepted ECU quarterback Rio Johnson on the first series of the ballgame. Appalachian took over on its own 42 and marched 58 yards in 10 plays, capped by a four-yard touchdown run by Jackson that gave the Apps a 7-0 lead. Jackson almost did it all on the 10-play drive, completing 5-of-5 passes for 48 yards and rushing twice for 10 more yards and the score.

Thanks largely to its stifling defense, Appalachian State still led 7-0 early in the second quarter and was approaching ECU territory on its third possession of the game when the C-USA officiating crew ruled that Jackson fumbled at the end of a five-yard run. East Carolina's Chris Thompson scooped up the loose ball and, with the majority of the players on the field and the 49,023 in attendance believing that Jackson was down, ran to the end zone before officials whistled the play dead. After a lengthy video review, it was ruled that there was not enough evidence to overturn the call on the field and the touchdown stood, tying the contest at 7-7.

Two possessions later, after a 43-yard punt return by Justin Hardy, the Pirates needed to go just 17 yards to take their first lead of the game on an 11-yard touchdown pass from Johnson to Andrew Bodenheimer.

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Despite what could have been a back-breaking turn of events, Appalachian grabbed the momentum back shortly before the intermission. After the Mountaineer defense capped a dominant first half by forcing an ECU three-and-out that ran just 25 seconds off the clock, the offense used terrific catches by Malachi Jones (Roswell, Ga./North Gwinnett) and Tony Washington (High Point, N.C./T.W. Andrews) to march 40 yards in just 38 seconds and Stewart kicked a 26-yard field goal to send the Apps to the locker room trailing 14-10.

Appalachian's defensive dominance continued well into the third quarter, highlighted by Brandon Grier (Charlotte, N.C./West Charlotte) forcing a fumble with a vicious hit on East Carolina running back Michael Dobson that was recovered by Ronald Blair (Greensboro, Ga./Greene County) on the ECU 43 yard line. The turnover, the second of the day forced by the Mountaineer defense, set up the 19-yard drive that culminated with Stewart's second field goal of the day and brought the Apps within a point of the upset.

Despite battling cramps brought on by the extreme heat and humidity in Greenville, Jackson completed 23-of-40 passes for 300 yards and ran seven times for 34 yards and a touchdown in the gritty loss. Washington hauled in seven of Jackson's 23 completions for a career-best 102 yards, while Andrew Peacock (Durham, N.C./Northern Durham) and Jones notched 77 and 69 yards, respectively, on five catches each. Steven Miller (Piscataway, N.J./Piscataway) was one of three Appalachian ball-carriers to notch at least 30 yards on the ground, finishing with 47 yards on 14 carries.

Appalachian's valiant defensive performance was led by Jeremy Kimbrough (Decatur, Ga./Cedar Grove), who tallied a game-high 13 tackles. Sanders added 10 stops to go along with his interception.

"I told them after the game," Moore said, "that we're just like the (Southeastern Conference), the Big 10, the Pac 12. Every week there's a big game and a tough game on the schedule. I'm real excited about this team."

After the gutsy season-opening effort, the sixth-ranked Mountaineers return to Kidd Brewer Stadium next week for the 2012 home opener and perhaps the most anticipated non-conference game in NCAA Division I FCS regular-season history versus No. 11 Montana. Kickoff is set for 6:30 p.m. at The Rock and the contest can be seen nationally on ESPN Gameplan and worldwide on ESPN3.

NOTES: Appalachian State's first-quarter touchdown marked the first time since its historic win at Michigan in 2007 that it scored on its first possession of the season ... Sanders' interception on ECU's opening series kept Appalachian's opponent off the scoreboard on the first offensive possession of a season-opener for the first time since 2006 at NC State and also marked the first time since the '06 loss at State an FBS opponent failed to score a touchdown on their opening possession against the Mountaineers ... ECU's fumble return for a touchdown was the first against Appalachian since the 2009 NCAA Division I Championship quarterfinals at Richmond ... the Pirates' kickoff return touchdown was the first surrendered by the Mountaineers since the opening kickoff of the second half at James Madison in 2008 ... despite its sixth-straight loss to ECU, Appalachian State still holds a 19-12 lead in the all-time series with the Pirates ... Appalachian also holds a 33-21 all-time edge against current members of Conference USA ... DB Jamill Lott (Kannapolis, N.C./A.L. Brown), WR Sean Price (Reston, Va./South Lakes) and LB Jamal Ware (Tyrone, Ga./Sandy Creek) did not participate in Saturday's game due to a violation of team rules — Coach Jerry Moore said after the game that all three would return to action on Sept. 15 vs. The Citadel.

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ASU NOTEBOOK

Team

- Appalachian State missed picking up its eighth victory over an NCAA Division I-A/FBS opponent since 1982. The Mountaineers fell to 7-32-1 versus FBS opponents.
- Appalachian lost to longtime in-state rival East Carolina for the sixth-straight time. The Mountaineers have not beaten ECU since 1975 and have not won at ECU since 1959. Appalachian still leads the all-time series between the programs, 19-12.
- Appalachian, which was opening versus a I-A/FBS opponent for the 16th time in 21 years, fell to 7-14 in its last 21 season openers. The Mountaineers dropped to 47-33-3 all-time in season openers.
- For the first time since 2006 (at NC State), Appalachian did not allow its opponent to score on its first offensive possession of the season opener.
- Also for the first time since 2006 at NC State, Appalachian did not allow an FBS opponent to score a touchdown on its first possession of the game.
- Appalachian's 58-yard touchdown drive on its first possession marked the first time that it scored on its first possession against an FBS opponent since Sept. 1, 2007 at Michigan.
- Appalachian's 7-0 lead was also its first against an FBS opponent since the 34-32 win at Michigan in 2007.
- ECU's 45-yard fumble return for a touchdown in the second quarter was the first allowed by Appalachian State since Richmond returned a fumbled punt eight yards for a score in the NCAA Division I Football Championship quarterfinals on Dec. 5, 2009.
- ECU's 90-yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the third quarter was the first allowed by Appalachian State since James Madison's Scotty McGee (99 yards) kickoff return for a

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touchdown on Sept. 20, 2008.

Individual

- Junior wide receiver Tony Washington set a career high with 102 receiving yards (prev. 78 vs. Samford – Oct. 22, 2011) and matched a career high with seven receptions (prev. 7 at Furman – Nov. 5, 2011).
- Eight Appalachian State players made their first-career starts: So. Drew Bailey, R-Fr. Simms McElfresh, R-Fr. LG Shaq Counts, Jr. RT Regan Dufort, Sr. RB Rod Chisholm, R-Fr. DE Davante Harris, R-Fr. NT Stephen Burns and R-Fr. Star Joel Ross.
- Seven true freshmen saw action for the Mountaineers: RB Ricky Fergerson, DB Alex Gray, LB Greg Hall, WR Malachi Jones, DB Aaron Krah, LB John Law and DL Tashion Singleton.

Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Total

Appalachian State 7 3 3 0 - 13

East Carolina 0 14 7 14 - 35

Qtr Time Scoring Play V-H

1st 08:31 APP - Jamal Jackson 4 yd run (Drew Stewart kick), 10-58 4:38 7 - 0

2nd 13:26 ECU - THOMPSON, Chip 45 yd fumble recovery (HARVEY, Warren kick) 7 - 7

07:59 ECU - BODENHEIMER, A. 11 yd pass from JOHNSON, Rio (HARVEY, Warren kick), 3-17 1:19 7 - 14

00:00 APP - Drew Stewart 26 yd field goal, 5-40 0:38 10 - 14

3rd 02:35 APP - Drew Stewart 41 yd field goal, 8-19 2:33 13 - 14

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02:19 ECU - RAY, Lance 90 yd kickoff return (HARVEY, Warren kick) 13 - 21

4th 14:19 ECU - HARDY, Justin 4 yd pass from JOHNSON, Rio (HARVEY, Warren kick), 7-59

2:14 13 - 28

08:28 ECU - JOHNSON, Rio 6 yd run (HARVEY, Warren kick), 9-76 4:00 13 - 35

FIRST DOWNS: ASU 20, ECU 25

RUSHING YARDS: ASU 119, ECU 148

PASSING YARDS: ASU 300, ECU 242

TOTAL YARDS: ASU 419, ECU 390

TURNOVERS: ASU 3, ECU 2

TIME OF POSSESSION: ASU 26:42, ECU 33:18

3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: ASU 4-15, ECU 9-16

4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: ASU 0-1, ECU 0-0

STATISTICS:

RUSHING:

ASU: MILLER 14-47, CHISHOLM 9-37

ECU: DOBSON 19-78

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PASSING:

ASU: JACKSON 23-40-11-300

ECU: JOHNSON 28-43-242-11-2TD

RECEIVING:

ASU: WASHINGTON 7-102, PEACOCK 5-77, JONES 5-69

ECU: WIGGINS 6-45, HARDY 6-38

Photo Courtesy: Steven Miller, ASU Athletics