

UPDATED: Shoeless Joe Downs ASU

Written by Mike Kelly
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Joe Jackson delivered the game-crushing blow Wednesday afternoon as The

Citadel victimized the Appalachian State University baseball team in the opening round of the Southern Conference Tournament at Fluor Field in Greenville, S.C.

The Bulldogs (33-24), the No.4 seed, thanks to that blow defeated ASU, 6-5. The win sends The Citadel into the winner's bracket. The Bulldogs will play the winner of Western Carolina and Samford on Thursday (at 5 p.m. or 8 p.m., depending on what Furman, the host school, does later today).

The Mountaineers (28-23), the No.5 seed, will play the loser of WCU-Samford on Thursday morning at 10 a.m. Coverage begins at 9:40 a.m. on AM 1450, WATA.

It was a heartbreaking loss for the Mountaineers, who wiped out a 5-3 deficit in the top of the ninth, thanks to Hector Crespo's two-run blast that cleared the left-field wall. That blow tied the game at 5-5.

But Jackson homered in the bottom of the ninth off losing pitcher Tyler Thurber (3-2) to win the game.

"You can say, 'what if,' all you want," said ASU coach Billy Jones. "The bottom line is that we didn't execute when we had to, and they did. We just have to come out tomorrow and be ready to play."

Thurber, the third pitcher used by Jones, had a pretty good outing before Jackson spoiled it. He gave up an earned run on one hit with two walks and a strikeout in two innings of work. Starting pitcher Jamie Nunn lasted until the sixth. He coughed up five earned runs on five hits with five walks and six strikeouts.

Austin Pritcher of The Citadel, the SoCon Pitcher of the Year, only lasted 4.2 innings. The Mountaineers roughed him up for three runs, all earned, on five hits, and five walks. But the Bulldogs bullpen kept ASU in check.

Three Bulldogs' pitcher (Ross White, Zach Sherrill and David Rivera) retired 12 men in a row before winning pitcher Skyler Hunter issued a one-out walk in the ninth. That led to Crespo's heroic blast that tied the game.

The Mountaineers out hit the Bulldogs 9-6, and the Bulldogs also made two errors. But the Mountaineers left seven men on base, and they also lost three baserunners, including a runner at the plate in the ninth.

"We didn't make sound fundamental choices and it came back to bite us," Jones said. "As much as this one hurts, you get another nine innings to play. We just have to play better tomorrow."

Crespo drove in three runs for the Mountaineers; Michael Pierson homered and drove in two runs. He was 2-4 on the day; Will Callaway was 3-5 and has now hit safely in 26 consecutive games, one shy of the school record set by Rand Smith.

Drew DeKerlegand paced the Bulldogs with a three-run triple in the third inning that gave the Bulldogs a 4-1 lead; Jackson was 2-2 with three walks, and two RBI, including his game-winning shot in the ninth. ASU pitching coughed up eight walks in Wednesday's loss.

"We struggled with our pitching all day," Jones said. "We walked way too many guys, and they took advantage of it. We had our chances early against Pritcher and we didn't capitalize."

The Bulldogs have beaten ASU four consecutive times this season. The win marks the second

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time the Bulldogs have picked up a walk-off win against ASU this season. The Citadel defeated ASU 8-7 with a run in the bottom of the ninth back in April.

NOTES: Appalachian is 29-44 overall and 4-8 in the conference tournament against The Citadel....Will Callaway is hitting .421 with a .588 slugging percentage during his 26-game hitting streak. Callaway is 48-114 with seven doubles , 26 RBI and 24 runs scored. He also has 15 multiple-hit games during the streak....Crespo has reached base safely 29 times in his last 30 games....Holmes has reached base safely in 13 consecutive games; Head has reached base safely in 11 straight games....ASU is three stolen bases shy of 100 for the season....ASU has not won the SoCon Tournament since 1984.

Photo Courtesy: Hector Crespo, ASU Athletics