

Irish Rallies to Stun Mountaineers

Written by James Ashley
Sunday, 02 March 2014 18:14

Appalachian State University baseball squandered a two-run lead in the bottom of the ninth inning and Notre Dame plated an unearned run in the 11th to walk off with a 4-3 victory over the Mountaineers

on Sunday afternoon in both teams' final game at the USA Baseball-Irish Classic.

Appalachian State (1-10) led 3-1 in the bottom of the ninth and needed only two outs to seal its second-straight win but Notre Dame (5-6) strung together four singles and a sacrifice fly to knot the score at 3-3 and send the game to extra innings.

After Taylor Thurber (Mooresville, N.C./Lake Norman) easily recorded the first out in the bottom of the ninth, three-straight Notre Dame singles loaded the bases with one out. Closer Robert Whaley (Hickory, N.C./Hickory) relieved Thurber and the first hitter he faced, Zak Kutsulis, lifted an 0-2 pitch into left field for a sacrifice fly that drew the Irish within a run at 3-2.

Whaley was one strike away from nailing down the victory against the very next batter, Kyle Fiala, but Fiala singled to center on a 2-2 count to drive in Conner Biggio with the tying run. Whaley issued a four-pitch walk to load the bases but got out of the jam with a groundout.

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The score remained 3-3 until the bottom of the 11th when Appalachian State's fourth pitcher of the afternoon, Dallas DeVrieze (Moline, Ill./Moline), opened the frame by inducing a groundball on an 0-2 pitch to Notre Dame leadoff hitter Forrest Johnson. However, Appalachian shortstop Dillon Dobson (Hamptonville, N.C./Starmount) made an error on the play that allowed the would-be winning run to reach first with no outs. A sacrifice bunt moved Johnson to second and a wild pitch put him on third with one out and Katsulis at the plate. Katsulis lined a 1-2 pitch through the right side of the infield and Johnson easily scored on the walk-off single.

The late-inning collapse overshadowed another fine start on the mound by App State left-hander Jeffrey Springs (Belmont, N.C./South Point). The junior overcame some early control issues to surrender just one run over 5.1 innings. He allowed four hits, issued four walks and struck out six, which tied a career high.

DeVrieze suffered the tough-luck loss despite not allowing an earned run. William Head (Asheville, N.C./Asheville) led the Mountaineers offensively with two hits, including an RBI single in the fourth. Jaylin Davis (McLeansville, N.C./Northeast Guilford) came off the bench for a pinch-hit RBI double in the sixth and Brandon Burris (Concord, N.C./Mt. Pleasant), who also started the game on the bench, gave Appalachian what appeared to be an insurance run with a solo home run in the ninth.

Katsulis led Notre Dame with the two clutch RBI in the ninth and 11th innings while Lane Richards had two hits for the Irish. ND reliever Cristian Torres retired two of the three batters he faced in the 11th to earn the win.

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Appalachian State hosts Campbell on Wednesday night at BB&T Ballpark in Winston-Salem, N.C. First pitch is set for 6 p.m.

NOTES: Six of Appalachian State's 10 losses have been by two runs or less ... the seven runs that Appalachian allowed in three games at the USA Baseball-Irish Classic are the fewest it has surrendered in a three-game weekend since Furman managed only seven combined runs in three games against the Mountaineers in 2012 (April 20-21) ... only three of the seven runs that App State allowed this weekend were earned, which were the fewest earned runs that the Apps have surrendered in a three-game weekend since Davidson plated just two earned runs in three games against the Mountaineers in 2011 (April 21-23) ... Appalachian State gets another crack at Notre Dame on March 11 when it hosts the Fighting Irish at Beaver Field at Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium in Boone.

Photo Courtesy: Dillon Dobson, ASU Athletics