

Pierson's 11th-Inning HR Lifts App State Over GSU

Written by Mike Flynn
Wednesday, 21 May 2014 16:52

Michael Pierson (Coral Springs, Fla./Pine Crest) led off the 11th inning with a home run off the fair pole in right field and Appalachian State University baseball opened its final Southern Conference Tournament

with a thrilling 3-2, 11-inning win over Georgia Southern on Wednesday morning at Riley Park.

With the victory, No. 5-seeded Appalachian State (21-32) advances to play No. 8-seeded Furman on Thursday at either 5 p.m. or 8 p.m. It all depends on what happens tonight between Davidson and The Citadel.

If the Bulldogs win, App State will play Furman at 8:30 p.m. (ish), but if Davidson wins, the Apps will play at 5 p.m. Fourth-seeded Georgia Southern (34-21) faces the loser of the WCU in an elimination game on Thursday at 10 a.m. Furman defeated WCU 3-2 on Wednesday afternoon.

Pierson's game-winning homer came only after Appalachian State rallied from a 2-0 deficit with single runs in the seventh and ninth innings.

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Trailing 2-0 with two outs in the top of the seventh, Jaylin Davis (McLeansville, N.C./Northeast Guilford) put the Mountaineers on the board with a single up the middle that brought Pierson home from third base and cut the deficit to 2-1.

After a scoreless eighth inning, Preston Troutman (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) led off the top of the ninth with a slow roller to short. However, Georgia Southern shortstop Dalton Busby air-mailed the throw into the stands behind first base and Troutman moved to second on the only error of the ballgame.

Troutman advanced to third on a groundout by Pierson but couldn't score on Tyler Zupcic's (Charlotte, N.C./Providence) hard-hit grounder to third and the Mountaineers were down to their final out.

Three pitches later, Dillon Dobson (Hamptonville, N.C./Starmount) smacked Jason Richman's 1-1 pitch into left field and Troutman scored easily to knot the score at 2-2.

It remained 2-2 until Pierson launched a 1-1 pitch from Georgia Southern's Ryan Frederick (4-1) down the right-field line. The only question — whether the towering shot would be fair or foul — was answered when the ball hit about half-way up the fair pole. Pierson's seventh home run of the season gave the Mountaineers a 3-2 lead.

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Georgia Southern threatened in the bottom of the 11th when Ben Morgan drew an eight-pitch walk with one out and stole second to move into scoring position. However, Appalachian State closer Robert Whaley (Hickory, N.C./Hickory) struck out GSU three-hole hitter Aaron Mizell on a 2-2 pitch for the second out and, one batter later, got Ryan Cleveland to pop up to Troutman at shortstop to end the game.

Whaley closed out a spectacular effort by four Appalachian State pitchers. Sixth-year senior Tyler Moore (Banner Elk, N.C./Watauga) made his first postseason start and limited Georgia Southern to just two runs on five hits over eight strong innings. He was followed by senior Zach Joyce (Lexington, N.C./North Davidson), who worked a perfect ninth to send the game to extra innings.

Whaley came on with runners on first and second and only one out in the bottom of the 10th but got Busby to fly out to Davis in center field for the second out. Davis caught the line drive on the run and fired the ball to second base to double GSU's Garrett Chapman off for an inning-ending double play and set up Pierson's heroics.

Whaley (3-1) turned in 1.2 hitless innings to earn the win.

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Davis went 3-for-5 with an RBI and Pierson finished 2-for-5 with two runs scored to pace Appalachian State's nine-hit attack.

Kody Adams (2-for-5) led Georgia Southern offensively.

NOTES: After winning just once in the first 48 games of the season when trailing at any point after the third inning, Appalachian State has come from behind in the fifth inning or later four times in the last eight days ... Appalachian beat Georgia Southern at the SoCon Tournament for only second time in seven meetings ... App State's only other tournament win over GSU came in the teams' last previous meeting, a 6-2 triumph in 2010 ... the Mountaineers have won a game in every SoCon Tournament appearance since 1996 (13-straight appearances with at least one victory) ... Pierson has reached base in 28-straight games ... Davis extended his team-best hitting streak to six games ... former Appalachian State shortstop Will Callaway was in attendance ... Callaway, now a member of the Savannah Sand Gnats (class-A affiliate of the San Francisco Giants), made the drive to Charleston with Sand Gnats teammate Ryder Jones, the son of Appalachian head coach Billy Jones.

Photo Courtesy: Michael Pierson, App State Athletics