

Walkoff Homer Dooms Mountaineers

Written by Mike Flynn
Thursday, 22 May 2014 20:57

Furman's Greg Harrison hit a two-run walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth inning to hand Appalachian State University baseball a heartbreaking 3-1 Southern Conference Tournament loss on

Thursday evening at Riley Park.

With the loss, No. 5-seeded Appalachian State (21-33) falls into the losers' bracket of the double-elimination tournament and faces No. 4 Georgia Southern (35-21) in an elimination game on Friday at 3 p.m. The winner of that game must beat No. 8 Furman (26-31) twice on Saturday to advance to Sunday's winner-take-all championship game.

Thursday's game was a classic pitchers' duel between Appalachian State's Jeffrey Springs (Belmont, N.C./South Point) and Furman's Tyler Wood.

Springs allowed only two hits and struck out 11 over eight innings but was saddled with an unearned run in the fourth inning when Appalachian State third baseman Michael Pierson (Coral Springs, Fla./Pine Crest) mishandled a two-out grounder that allowed Furman's Hunter Burton to come home from third with the first run of the game.

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The score remained 1-0 until the top of the ninth when Wood joined Springs as the victim of a costly error. With runners on first and second and two outs, Appalachian State's Alex Leach (Charlotte, N.C./Ardrey Kell) hit a grounder to second that was booted by Furman second baseman Jordan Simpson to load the bases.

Appalachian's next batter, Brian Bauk (Salisbury, N.C./Salisbury), drew a five-pitch walk that forced Dobson home with the tying run. The Mountaineers nearly took the lead when Ozzy Gonzalez (Miami, Fla./South Miami) followed Bauk's walk with a flare into left field but Furman's Carter Grote made a terrific diving catch to send the game to the bottom of the ninth knotted at 1-1.

In the bottom of the ninth, Appalachian State reliever Taylor Thurber (Mooresville, N.C./Lake Norman) walked Grote after jumping ahead 0-2 in the count to put the winning run on base. However, the leadoff walk proved to be inconsequential when Harrison drove the first pitch he saw from Thurber just inside the fair pole in left field for the game-winning home run.

Despite Furman's late-game heroics, the game was decided on the basepaths as a controversial call and two baserunning errors likely cost the Mountaineers several runs.

In the top of the first inning, Tyler Stroup (Thomasville, N.C./East Davidson) tagged up from

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second on Preston Troutman's (Rockwell, N.C./East Rowan) long flyout to right field. Stroup easily advanced to third but Furman made a quick appeal to second base and umpire Darion Padgett called Stroup out — giving Appalachian no runners on base with two outs instead of a runner on third with one out. The disputed call proved to be big when the Mountaineers followed with a single and a double that likely would have given App State an early 2-0 lead.

The Mountaineers also had two doses of self-inflicted damage on the basepaths when Bauk was easily thrown out at third after tagging up on a shallow fly ball to right field in the fifth and when Tyler Zupcic (Charlotte, N.C./Providence) was also gunned down at third when trying to advance from first to third on Dillon Dobson's (Hamptonville, N.C./Starmount) one-out infield single in the ninth.

Like Springs, Wood did not figure in the decision after his sterling outing. Furman's right-hander scattered eight hits over 8.2 innings, walked two and struck out five while surrendering only the unearned run in the ninth. Alex Abrams (8-2) got the final out of the ninth to earn the win while Thurber (1-7) suffered the loss.

Pierson and Zupcic had two hits apiece to lead Appalachian State offensively.

NOTES: Appalachian State suffered its 11th one-run loss of the season ... the Mountaineers fell to 5-6 all-time versus Furman at the SoCon Tournament ... Springs' 8.0 IP and 11 strikeouts were career highs ... the southpaw's previous career high for innings pitched was 7.1 at Georgia

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Southern on March 23 and his previous career high for strikeouts was eight at Samford on May 11 ... Pierson reached base for the 29th-straight game but Troutman's 22-game streak was snapped.

Photo Courtesy: Jeffrey Springs, App State Athletics