Watauga High senior Dylan Norris loves a challenge, if given the chance.

And the former bull-rider, who has developed into quite a pitching phenom, is ready to take his game to another level next fall. Norris, who was the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Pitcher of the Year last season, signed his national letter of intent on Wednesday to play baseball at Pfeiffer University next season. Pfeiffer is a Division II school and a member of the Conference Carolinas. And for Norris, it's the perfect fit.

"I was given a chance to play college baseball, and I accepted it after talking it over with my dad," Norris said. "I never really heard about the school until I played a showcase tournament there. And I threw five shutout innings, and their coach (Mark Hayes) spoke to me after that and made the offer."

And for Norris, it's a golden opportunity, especially for a guy that bypassed playing baseball his freshman year because he preferred riding bulls in the rodeo.

"I finally got him to come out and play baseball," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "And he's really developed into a great pitcher for us. His velocity has picked up and he's going to play a huge role for us this season."

Pfeiffer will lose up to eight pitchers to graduation after this upcoming season, so that gives Norris an honest chance to step right in as a true freshman in the spring of 2012. But he knows, his focus right now, is giving WHS a solid chance at winning every time he steps on the mound this spring. Afterall, Norris was 6-0 in league play last season and he nosed out Tyler Barnette of Hickory (drafted in the ninth round of the Major League Baseball draft by the Boston Red Sox, and who has since signed with UNC-Charlotte) for top pitching honors.

"I know the pressure is on this season," Norris said. "I'll see everyone's best, that's for sure. But I've really worked hard this past summer playing for the Heat 18-and-under team getting ready for this. I saw a lot of quality hitters this summer."

He also served up his first home-run ball this summer. But for Norris, that's nothing new. Turn the clock back a few years, and let's focus on his bull-riding experience. Sitting on a huge bull, waiting in the chute before the gate pops open. The goal is hanging on for eight seconds without getting tossed.

"I've had my share of falls," Norris said. "But I won championships at it my first three years. I went from calves to steer then to the bulls. And when I got to that last stage, that's when the injuries began and the hospital bills starting coming in. So my dad said, 'that's enough.'"

And Norris, despite those scary moments, hasn't lost his bravado. He attacks hitters on the mound with the same "tough-guy" mentality he displayed during his rodeo days.

"And that's what I like about him, and what coach Hayes likes about him," Hardee said. "He's got that bulldog-mind set. He'll go after guys, and he won't shy away. That's why he's developed into the pitcher that he is."

And Norris admits, Pete Hardee is responsible for his success. Norris displayed his talents at the jayvee level two years ago, when he threw a no-hitter against Alexander Central down in Taylorsville. And he showcased those talents last season with three complete games, a shutout, and six conference wins.

"Coach Hardee and I both have weird types of motions." Norris said. "We are very similar in

pitching styles. And if I do something wrong on a pitch, he can correct the problem right away. I wouldn't be the pitcher I am without him. He's really taught me a lot."