

Pioneers Ground Rockets, 11-4

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 02 March 2011 08:26

The Watauga High baseball team opened the season on a convincing note Tuesday night.

The Pioneers, who are pre-season favorites to win the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference this season, lived up to their pre-season hype as they pounded A.C. Reynolds 11-4 in their season opener at Davis Field in Asheville. Max Linville and Ryan Turner backboned the 14-hit attack as those two combined for seven hits, a double, a home run, two stolen bases and five runs-batted-in.

"We was a good game for the first time out," Linville said. "And we know what people are saying about us. But we have to live up to the hype by taking care of business on the field. We really came out to play tonight."

Jake Watts, who established himself as a reliable arm on the WHS pitching staff, got the win. The righthander, who will attend Milligan College next fall, went four innings, gave up an earned run, scattered four hits and struck out a career-high ten men. And he really buckled down after the Rockets touched him up for a pair of runs in the first inning.

"Jake wasn't real aggressive in the first inning," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "He was trying to hit his spots instead of going after the hitters. But once he settled in, he was superb. He did a good job for the first time out, and I feel he'll only get better and better."

The Pioneers (1-0) didn't waste any time getting on the board. They sent eight men to the plate and scored three times against losing pitcher Jackson Fuller. Linville led off with a double, and he came around to score on Turner's run-scoring single. Garrett McGuire had a two-run single in the frame that gave WHS an early 3-0 lead. But the Rockets touched Watts for a pair of runs in the bottom of the first, making it 3-2.

Nathan Blaylock singled to drive in a run, and another run scored when left-fielder Josh Roberts misplayed Blaylock's single. But after that, Watts shut the door on the Rockets (0-1) before he was replaced by Ethan Greene in the fifth. Watts threw 79 pitches. Greene, Tyler Jones (in the sixth) and Matt Proffitt (in the seventh) closed things out. The Pioneers finally put the game out of reach with a five-run explosion in the third.

The Pioneers batted around in the frame. Proffitt had a run-scoring double, Turner had a two-run single, Roberts drove in a run with an infield single that ricocheted off the pitcher, and Linville walked to drive in another run. That gave WHS a commanding 8-2 lead and the Pioneers cruised home from there.

Linville, who blasted his first home run of the year in the sixth to give WHS an 11-2 lead, was 3-4 with a double, a home run, a walk and three runs scored; Turner was 4-5 with three RBI, two runs scored and two stolen bases. David Martin had a single and a double in four trips with a walk.

"I like our team," Hardee said. "We have great speed on the bases, and we're going to put a lot of pressure on opposing defenses. But we still have a lot of things to work on. This is only the first game of the season, but it's a good win for us. It gives us a lot of confidence going into our

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next game with North Davidson. They're ranked tenth in the (Impact Baseball) pre-season poll. Then we play Ardrey Kell Saturday, and they're the No.1 team in the area right now. It'll be tough, and we've got to be ready to play."

The Pioneers travel to North Davidson Thursday night. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: A.C. Reynolds won the JV game, 4-1.....The last time WHS opened the season at A.C, Reynolds was on March 6, 1998. Matt Johnson of the Pioneers threw a perfect game that day as WHS won 6-0.