Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High baseball team nearly pulled off a huge upset on a rainy Saturday afternoon in Charlotte.

The Pioneers (2-1), who scored 22 runs in back-to-back season-opening wins against A.C. Reynolds and North Davidson, came up a little short against Ardrey Kell, the No.1 team in the state in Class 4A, dropping a 9-8 decision. The Pioneers spotted Ardrey Kell an early 7-0 lead. The Knights (6-0) scored three times in the first inning against losing pitcher Jake Watts. Alex Leach had the big blow with a two-run double in the frame. A sacrifice fly by Drew Davies and a two-run homer by Logan Ratledge highlighted a three-run second inning that gave Ardrey Kell a commanding 6-0 lead.

Watts (1-1) went 1 2/3 innings and was touched up for six runs all earned on five hits. He walked two and struck out two. Dylan Norris came on in relief with two outs in the second inning. And the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Pitcher of the Year looked very good.

In only his second outing of the year, Norris, whose been battling a twinge in his pitching shoulder, went 3 1/3 innings, gave up no runs on one hit, he struck out five, and walked one.

Josh Roberts finally got WHS on the board with a two-run shot in the top of the fifth, and the Pioneers got within 7-6 with a four-run explosion in the top of the sixth. Ten men batted in the frame. Max Linville homered to get things started. Then the Pioneers took advantage of three walks, two hit batsmen, a wild pitch and a run-scoring single by Tyler Jones to narrow the gap. But the rally fell short as Ardrey Kell scored twice off Matt Proffitt in the bottom of the sixth for a 9-6 lead. The Pioneers scored two more times in the top of the seventh. Three walks, one intentional, two wild pitches and an RBI single by Roberts fueled the rally. But with runners at first and third and two outs, Chris McCue struck out Ethan Critcher to end the game.

Roberts backboned WHS with two hits and four RBI. The Pioneers only made five hits and committed three errors. Trent Thornton had three hits and scored three times for Ardrey Kell. Davies had two hits and knocked in two runs. Leach had two RBI.

Winning pitcher Brad Stone kept the Pioneers in check. He had a no-hitter through the first four innings before Proffitt broke it up with a lead-off single in the fifth. Stone gave up two earned runs on two hits with six strikeouts in five innings of work. McCue picked up the save.

The Pioneers travel to Mount Tabor Tuesday night. Our next broadcast of WHS baseball will be Friday night, March 11 when the Pioneers take on South Caldwell in their NW3A/4A Conference opener. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.