

Pioneers Rally Past Tigers

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 19 March 2011 12:33

Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good.

Just ask Watauga High baseball coach Pete Hardee. The Pioneers (5-2 overall; 2-1 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference), who were handcuffed by pitcher Mitchell Henderson most of the night, rallied to beat Fred T. Foard 4-3 in nine innings Friday night down in Newton. A misplayed fly ball by Tigers' leftfielder Jonathan Fleetwood in the top of the ninth allowed the eventual winning run to score.

"I was definitely outcoached tonight," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "(Channon Vogel) did a great job pressuring our defense with their running game, and their pitcher really shut us down. He pretty much dominated us for eight innings. We were glad to see him come out of there in the ninth inning. I told (Henderson) after the game that was the best pitched game I've seen in quite some time."

Henderson, who was lit up by the Pioneers (4-2 overall; 2-1 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) last season for five earned runs in six innings of work, held the Pioneers at bay for the majority of the evening. Following a lead-off walk to Max Linville to start the game, he retired the next 12 men he faced. He held the Pioneers hitless for 4 2/3 innings.

And Henderson was rewarded for his efforts as the Tigers (4-4; 2-2) handed him a 2-0 lead with a two-out rally in the fourth. A walk to Kyle Yoder and a run-scoring double by Brandon Owensby snapped the scoreless tie. An error by Linville at short allowed courtesy runner Ben Hilton (running for Owensby) to score all the way from second base.

But the Pioneers finally broke through in the fifth. Ethan Critcher broke up Henderson's no-hit bid with a two-out double, and Clint Trivette put WHS on the board with a three-run homer, giving the Pioneers a 3-2 lead. The hit was Trivette's third in the last two games batting in the nine hole.

"(Trivette) probably worked eight rounds of batting practice the other night, trying to get his swing down," Hardee said. "Clint Trivette is a good hitter, he can hit balls like that. He was just doing some things wrong with his hands. He's one of the hardest workers on our team, and it paid off for him tonight."

But the Tigers came charging back and tied the game with a run in the fifth. Josh Fulbright, who was thorn in Watauga's side all night, singled to lead off the frame, he stole second base and he stole home on a delayed steal to tie the game at three. Fulbright was 3-3 with a sacrifice, four stolen bases and a run scored.

Ethan Greene, who had a no decision, finally left the game in the sixth with two outs. Dylan Norris came on and shut the door on Fred T. Foard. He faced 11 men and struck out seven, picking up his first win of the season.

"Ethan did a good job," Hardee said. "He carried us into the sixth inning, but I made the change and decided that if we were going to get beat, they were going to beat us with our best pitcher on the mound."

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Greene turned in a yoeman effort. The righthander went 5 2/3 innings, gave up three runs, two earned on seven hits. He struck out four, walked two and hit a batter.

Henderson, who retired the last ten men he faced, including seven by strikeout, finally left the game in the ninth. Henderson gave up three runs, all earned on two hits with two walks and 12 strikeouts in eight innings of work. He was relieved by Tyler Dickens, who was victimized by the Pioneers in the top of the ninth. With the game tied at three and two outs, Josh Roberts singled, and Matt Proffitt reached on an error.

Tyler Jones followed and hit what seemed like a routine fly ball into left field. But Fleetwood lost the ball in the lights. It fell in and then the ball skipped off his glove allowing Roberts to score all the way from second base. Norris made it stand up with a pair of strikeouts in the bottom of the ninth.

"We were real fortunate to win this game," Hardee said. "I don't know how we did it, but we won and that's all that matters. It's a big win for us with Alexander (Central) coming up (Tuesday) next week."

The Pioneers, who will play their home opener against A.C. Reynolds Saturday afternoon, travel to Taylorsville to play Alexander Central Tuesday night. The scheduled starting pitchers will be Brennan James for the Cougars (he threw a no-hitter against Hickory last Wednesday) and Norris for the Pioneers. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

SOUTH CALDWELL 2-0; 6-0
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 2-1; 2-5
WATAUGA 2-1; **5-2**
FRED T. FOARD 2-2; 4-4
HICKORY 1-2; 4-4
ST. STEPHENS 1-3; 2-4
HIBRITEN 1-3; 1-6

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FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

WHS 4, FRED T. FOARD 3 (9 INNINGS)

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 7, ST. STEPHENS 3

SOUTH CALDWELL 8, HIBRITEN 1

KINGS MOUNTAIN 10-7, HICKORY 3-5

SATURDAY'S GAMES

A.C.REYNOLDS @ WHS

HIBRITEN @ WEST WILKES

HICKORY @ NORTH LINCOLN

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