Written by Mikw Kelly
Thursday, 24 March 2011 15:36

Watauga High senior Garrison McGuire has been a real blessing for the Pioneers so far this season.

McGuire, who smacked his first home run of the year Tuesday night against Alexander Central in a 5-3 win, has turned into a real asset for coach Pete Hardee. And for a guy playing behind the very talented David Martin, McGuire has developed a strong work ethic. And it's paid off in a big way.

"David is a great player," McGuire said. "No doubt about that. I'm a catcher, too. But he's the guy right now. But I work hard in practice everyday just in case coach Hardee needs me back there."

But McGuire has worked his way into the starting line as a designated hitter. He got off to a blistering start at the beginning of the year, but he began struggling some at the plate in recent games. His resurgence came against the Cougars as he belted a first-pitch, pinch-hit home run that gave the Pioneers a 4-0 lead.

"He put it right down the middle and I just jumped on it," he said. "Hitting is a challenge, and it isnt' something you can dwell on. If you do that, you're really going to sturggle. Luckily, I've worked on some things and corrected my swing."

And getting advice from former Pioneer Jonathan Greene, who is currently playing for the Frisco Roughriders of the Texas League, a Class AA affiliate of the Texas Rangers, didn't hurt, either.

"I've know Jonathan since I was eight-years-old," McGuire said. "His dad did some work for my dad. That's how I met him. And we've really become good friends over the years. He's really helped me with some great advice. Heck, I was struggling with my swing earlier this year and I text him at spring training, and he took the time out to tell me some stuff I put to good use."

And McGuire,. like many of the seniors on this year's team, is being heavily counted on as the Pioneers (7-2 overall; 3-1 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) aim their sights on their third consecutive conference championship. At the moment, the Pioneers find themselves in a two-way tie for the lead with South Caldwell.

"Like we did back in the '90's, we must start seperating ourselves from the rest of these teams," Hardee said. "And I like the makeup of this group. They don't get caught up in a lot things. When we lost to South Caldwell (on March 14), they didn't panic. They know it's a long season, and we'll get another shot at them."

And the Pioneers hope to keep pace Friday night when they travel to Hickory. And McGuire, who singled in his only appearance against the Red Tornadoes (6-4; 2-2) last season, feels the Pioneers have the the necessary tools to win the conference.

"We played with a great group of seniors last year," McGuire said. "Those guys had the drive, and it's rubbed off on us. You could see that when we went to North Davidson. We were suppose to be the underdogs, but we went in there with a lot of momentum and we jump on them right away.

"Winning the conference last year really gave us a lot of confidence coming into this season. And having coach Hardee is huge. He really knows how to motivate us. I love playing for him, and I really respect him."

And the feeling is mutual. Hardee didn't hesitate at all when he called McGuire to pinch hit on Tuesday night against the Cougars.

"He's really been swinging the bat good for us this season," Hardee said. "And I wanted him up there in that situation."

And the move paid off. And for McGuire, who will hang up his spikes after this season, he hopes to continue his contributing ways.

"This is it for me," he said. "I've been accepted at (Appalachian State University) and I'm going to concentrate on a career in construction like my dad. It's my senior year, and it's hard to believe four years have flown by like they have. It's been a great senior year, so far. And I want to finish it on a strong note."

The Pioneers travel to Hickory Friday night. Jake Watts gets the staring nod for WHS; Robert Whaley gets the call for Hickory. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.