

Pioneers Nip St. Stephens, 4-3

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 30 March 2011 08:38

Baseball is such an unpredictable game.

One day, you're on top of the world, and the next day, you find yourself struggling and searching for answers. Well, that was the case Tuesday night as the Watauga High baseball team, coming off a disappointing effort last Friday night against Hickory, rallied to beat St. Stephens 4-3 in a Northwestern 3A/4A Conference game.

The win moves WHS (8-3 overall; 4-2 in league play) into a second-place tie with Fred T. Foard, which had the night off. And both the Pioneers and the Tigers trail South Caldwell by one full game for that No.1 seed. The Spartans clobbered Hickory 10-0 Tuesday night in Sawmills. "We're right where we were last year at this time," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "And we did all of this on the road. We've got a lot of home games coming up in conference in the next month. And that should be a huge benefit for us."

But the Pioneers had their anxious moments. Dylan Norris, who came in with a 6.89 earned-run-average against the Indians (2-7; 1-5) in his career, had another trying effort. The first four men he faced in the opening frame all reached. Jacob Hoyle's base hit plated a run and gave the Indians an early 1-0 lead.

Then with two outs in the second inning, sophomore Adam Sturgill, who should be a rising star for the Indians, reached on a scratch hit. He advanced to third on Dillon Spencer's base hit and scored on a passed ball for a 2-0 lead.

The Pioneers came charging back, however thanks to Ryan Turner, who broke out of his mammoth slump with a towering three-run homer in the third inning. That big blow came off losing pitcher zach Bumgarner and it gave WHS a 3-2 lead.

"With David (Martin) out of the lineup (with a concussion), I decided to move Ryan back into the two hole because I knew he could produce," Hardee said. "He's got the power and he got on that pitch."

But the Indians came right back and tied it up thanks to a lead-off single by Hoyle in the bottom of the third and Ricky Miller's run-scoring double deep in the gap in right-centerfield. That drive by Miller also finished the night for Norris.

"Dylan didn't have his best stuff," Hardee said. "He might have been dragging a bit. Remember, he came in and pitched in relief against Foard, and then he started the next game. He really wasn't that sharp tonight."

But despite some shakey moments, Norris only gave up two earned runs and struck out four men in two-plus innings of work. Ethan Greene came on in relief and completely shut the Indians down.

The righthander gave up an infield single to Sturgill (who was 2-3 with a walk and two runs scored) in the fourth. He walked one and struck out seven men in five innings of work. He simply overpowered the Indians in the sixth and seventh innings.

"That's what I like about Ethan," Hardee said. "He comes into a game with the mindset of

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shutting the other team down. He does a very good job of keeping us in the game. And he was fresh tonight. He hadn't pitched in a while, and I wanted him out there. I'm proud of the effort he gave us."

And while Greene (2-1 on the year) stymied the Indians, Matt Proffitt, who like Turner has had his struggles at the plate, delivered in the clutch with a huge base hit in the sixth. With the game tied at three, Turner led off the inning with an infield single, moved to second on a passed ball and raced to third on Ethan Critcher's ground-ball out. That set the stage for Proffitt, who smacked an 0-2 pitch into right-field scoring Turner with what turned out to be the eventual winning run.

"We really worked on hitting with two strikes last night (at practice) and going the opposite way," Hardee said. "Matt did that all night, and he stepped up big in that situation. Man, every time we play St. Stephens, they give us everything they've got. It was a struggle, but I'm glad to get out of here with a win."

The Indians out-hit WHS 8-7, but they left five men on base and four in scoring position. They also lost a base runner and hit into two double plays. The Pioneers return home to play North Davidson in a non-conference game Saturday afternoon. Our coverage begins at 2 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The Pioneers are 2-1 in one-run games this season.....David Martin is expected to be cleared to play by the doctor on Friday. He should be in the lineup Saturday against North Davidson.....Garrison, McGuire, who handled the catching duties in Martin's absence Tuesday night, might have suffered a concussion after being struck by a foul ball. He was a little woozie after the game, according to coach Pete Hardee. McGuire went to the hospital with his father for precautionary reasons.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS:

SOUTH CALDWELL 5-1; 8-1
WATAUGA 4-2; **8-3**
FRED T. FOARD 4-2; 6-4
HICKORY 3-3; 7-5
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 3-3; 4-7
ST. STEPHENS 1-5; 2-7
HIBRITEN 1-5; 2-9

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TUESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

WATAUGA 4, ST. STEPHENS 3

SOUTH CALDWELL 10, HICKORY 0

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 7, HIBRITEN 3

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES:

FRED T. FOARD @ NEWTON-CONOVER

BUNKER HILL @ ST. STEPHENS

THURSDAY'S GAMES:

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HIBRITEN @ WEST LINCOLN
ALEXANDER CENTRAL @ DAVIE COUNTY

FRIDAY'S GAMES:

HICKORY @ HIBRITEN
ST. STEPHENS @ SOUTH CALDWELL
ALEXANDER CENTRAL @ FRED T. FOARD

SATURDAY'S GAMES:

NORTH DAVIDSON @ WATAUGA

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