

Pioneers Upended By Chase, 6-2

Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High baseball team suffered another disappointing loss on Monday afternoon.

The Pioneers (11-7 overall) dropped a 6-2 decision to Chase (a Class 2A school from the Southern Mountain 2A/3A Athletic Conference) in the opening round of the East Rutherford Easter Tournament at McNair Field in Forest City, NC. Winning pitcher Jared Allen (3-0) escaped a bases-loaded jam in the first inning and took control from there.

"The first inning was definitely the key," said Chase coach Matt Tipton. "They had the bases loaded, and they had a chance to put two or three runs on the board. But Jared worked through it, and it really jump-started his confidence."

Allen proceeded to retire the next ten men he faced. Ethan Critcher finally snapped the streak with a lead-off double in the fifth. But Allen, who wasn't overpowering, retired the next three hitters to end the threat.

"Watauga has a quality program," Tipton said. "And they can hit. Our goal was to pitch them inside. That's why he hit two men early in the game (both in the first inning). Keep in mind, he's not a hard thrower, so he can't really challenge hitters. He's got to move the ball around, and he did that rather successfully today."

Allen, who went the distance, gave up two earned runs on four hits. He struck out five, walked two, despite hitting two men. And the Trojans (12-5) gave Allen all the runs he needed by scoring twice in the third inning. An error, a sacrifice and a run-scoring single by Thomas Melton broke the scoreless tie. Cameron Wilkens followed with an RBI double that gave the Trojans a 2-0 lead. The Pioneers also made two errors in the inning.

Chase put the contest out of reach with three more runs in the fourth. A one-out triple by Mitchell Paris, a run-scoring bloop single by Jay Turner against a drawn-in infield, a double by the No.9 hitter Blake Moffitt, and a two-run single by Melton made it 5-0. Melton, who was on the shelf with a bad back in recent weeks, had a productive day. The shortstop was 3-4 with three RBI and a run scored.

"He brings a lot to the table for us," Tipton said. "He's a special guy to have batting second in our lineup. He's a good hitter, and he puts the ball in play."

Ethan Greene (3-3) suffered the loss. The right-hander, who suffered his second loss in a row, carried WHS into the fifth inning. He coughed up six runs, five earned on nine hits.

"We got around on him a little better the second time around," Tipton said. "He was falling behind most of the day, and when you do that, you've got to come to the hitter. We hit the ball pretty hard for the most part against him all day. And we finally broke through in the third inning."

WHS finally got on the board in the sixth. A lead-off walk to Max Linville and double by Ryan Turner plated the first WHS run. Turner moved to third on a wild pitch and came home on Josh Robert's ground-ball out. The Pioneers threatened again in the seventh. But a bizarre double play ended the game.

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With runners at first and second and one out, David Martin hit a deep fly ball to right field. Paris ran it down on the warning track for the second out. But the baserunners, Critcher and Clint Trivette, advanced on the play and we standing at second and third. The end result, Trivette was doubled off at first base to end the game.

"There's not much to say," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "We were awful."
The loss moves WHS into the consolation bracket. The Pioneers will play R.S Central Wednesday at 12 noon. Our coverage of that game begins at 11:30 am on Oldies 100.7 FM.