

Hardee Reaches Milestone

Written by Mike Kelly
Friday, 29 April 2011 09:15

The Watauga High baseball team rewarded head coach Pete Hardee with his 300th career win on Thursday afternoon.

And fittingly, it happened in a baseball environment---Forest City, NC. The Pioneers (13-7 overall) defeated Team Carolina (a home-school team) 15-5 in the fifth-place game of the East Rutherford Easter Tournament at McNair Field. The game was called after five innings because of the ten-run mercy rule.

The Pioneers, who spotted the Spartans (16-18-4) a 1-0 lead in the top of the first inning, came charging back with a three-run explosion in the bottom of the inning.

Back-to-back doubles by David Martin and Ryan Turner tied the game, an error and four wild pitches gave WHS a 3-1 advantage. The Pioneers put it away with a six-run explosion in the third as they sent 11 men to the plate.

"It's nice to get to 300 wins," said Hardee, now in his 21st year as a head coach. "It's took a while, though. But it's just a matter of hard work, and the players I've been blessed with."

A modest response by a man, who willed himself into becoming a Division I pitcher at Appalachian State University. And that determination also allowed him to reach All-America status during his playing career with the Mountaineers, and it got him elected into the ASU Hall of Fame.

"The guy is a legend," said assistant coach Dustin Kerley, who's in his second season with the program. "I've learned so much from him all ready. Coach Hardee is just a great coach. He's made me better. Everyday, he'll do something that I'll make a mental note of, or I'll keep it in the back of my mind. Our guys will run through a wall for him. They really believe in him."

And the Pioneers, who have struggled of late, have rallied in their last two outings. They've erupted for 24 runs in those games, and now find themselves heading into the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference tournament with some lofty goals.

"Our first goal is to make the state playoffs, whether it's as a No.2 seed, or as a wildcard," Hardee said. "But I really want to win that conference tournament. I would like to see us play up to our potential. This team has the talent, but we just haven't put it all together yet."

The Pioneers, the No.3 seed, will open the NW3A/4A tournament at home Tuesday night against St. Stephens, the No.6 seed. Ethan Greene (3-3), who has lost his last two decisions, will get the starting nod in the opening nod.

"We're going to take a chance with Greenie in the first round," Hardee said. "Then we'll come back with (Jake) Watts in the semifinals (Friday night, and most likely against Alexander Central). "I was proud of the effort today. We had a couple of break downs (in the fourth inning), but we played through it. And our bats have really come to life in our last two games."

Leading 9-1 in the fourth inning, the Pioneers made three errors that allowed four runs to score. The Spartans only made one hit in the inning, and narrowed the gap at 9-5. But the Spartans returned the favor by committing a pair of errors in the bottom of the fourth that handed the Pioneers unearned runs. Tyler Jones had an RBI single, and pinch-hitter Garrison McGuire drove in a run with a sacrifice fly in the frame as WHS opened up a 12-5 lead.

Jones, who made his first start of the year on the mound, had a steady performance for the most part. Unfortunately, he was victimized by WHS's sloppy play in the fourth. The left-hander

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gave up five runs, but only one was earned, on four hits. He walked one, hit a man and struck out four during his 3 2/3 inning stint. Matt Proffitt came on in relief and picked up his second win of the year.

WHS put it away with three more runs in the fifth. A two-run single by Josh Roberts made it 14-5, and a single by Ethan Critcher put runners on at first and third with nobody out. A double-play ball off the bat of Cory Belden scored Roberts with the decisive run ending the game.

"I like this tournament," Hardee said. "I'm sorry we lost on Monday, but they do a great job here. I love the area. It's a baseball area, and this facility (McNair Field) is a great place to play. We were very happy coming here, and we plan on coming back next season."

Ryan Turner paced the Pioneers with three hits, including a double, a triple, two runs scored and two RBI. Max Linville had a single and scored three times; Proffitt walked three times and scored three runs; Roberts had two RBI, and Brian Bolster, making his first start of the year, had a single, a walk and he drove in a run. Bolster had two hits and three RBI in the tournament. "He's an example of what hard work will do," Hardee said. "He earned that chance, and he delivered when his moment came."

And Bolster also had a very good teacher to model himself after.

NOTES: Our coverage of WHS baseball Tuesday night begins at 6:30 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.....South Caldwell won the tournament championship by defeating Alexander Central 10-9. The Spartans wiped out a 9-4 deficit to win that game. South Caldwell has beaten the Cougars three times this season.....Chase won the third-place game by blasting East Rutherford, 11-0....Hickory Ridge won the seventh-place game by defeating R.S. Central 14-2 in six innings.

THURSDAY'S SCOREBOARD:

EAST RUTHERFORD TOURNAMENT:

FIFTH PLACE GAME: WATAUGA 15, TEAM CAROLINA 5 (5 INNINGS)

SEVENTH PLACE GAME: HICKORY RIDGE 14, R.S. CENTRAL 2 (6 INNINGS)

THIRD PLACE GAME: CHASE 11, EAST RUTHERFORD 0

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: SOUTH CALDWELL 10, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 9

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NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A SCOREBOARD:

DRAUGHN 11, HIBRITEN 10

FRIDAY'S GAMES:

HIBRITEN @ NORTH IREDELL (DH)

SATURDAY'S GAMES:

DRAUGHN @ SOUTH CALDWELL

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