Beating a team twice in one season is tough enough. But to do it three times is nearly impossible.

That came to fruition Wednesday night as South Caldwell High softball team (11-11) avenged a pair of losses in the regular season to beat Watauga in the opening round of the Class 4A state playoffs. The Spartans scored three runs in the top of the seventh inning, and staved off a late rally by WHS to beat the host Pioneers 5-4 at the Sports Complex. The win moves South Caldwell into a second-round match-up against Lake Norman on the road.

WHS (9-13) took a 3-2 lead with a run in the bottom of the sixth inning. But the Spartans scored three runs with two outs, helped by a Chastan Hall single that drove in Laney Triplett, giving South a 4-3 lead.

A run-scoring single by Chesla Miller gave the Spartans an insurance run and a 5-3 lead.

“We were just trying to put the ball in play,” South coach Mora Brookshire said. “We were struggling hitting, so I told them we’re going to put the ball in play and we’re going to bunt and try to make them make the plays.”

The Pioneers staged a rally in the bottom of the seventh. Kim Robinson doubled and scored on Elizabeth Dollar's single, making it 5-4. But the Pioneers left two runners on base before Hall struck out Tori Wright to end the game.

“I told the girls that there were a lot of could’ves and should’ves and things like that,” Watauga coach Stephanie Long said. “Shelby was pitching a great game, but they were getting their timing down. Shelby was pitching great, so let’s go for it, because the bottom of the lineup wasn’t hitting well, so that was my should’ve, could’ve for the game.”

Hall had a big night for the Spartans. She had an RBI double in the third inning, and scored on a Miller double that gave the Spartans an early 2-1 lead.

Defensively, Hall scattered nine hits and three batters. She also benefitted from a good defensive play in the second inning on a diving stop by Lyndsay Parham at second base. South Caldwell also turned a double play in the first, when shortstop Lauren Silvers caught a Taylor Drummonds line drive and double off Reilly Pudney at first base.

“I thought Chastan had a great game,” Brookshire said. “That was one of her best game pitching and hitting. We struggled a little bit — we had a couple of defensive errors in the game, but Chastan came through right there.”

Watauga grabbed an early 1-0 lead on Shelby Drummonds' solo home run in the first. The Pioneers went up 3-2 thanks to Robinson's RBI single in the fifth and Nicole Dollar's RBI single in the sixth. But the Pioneers left nine runners on base, including the bases loaded in the fifth inning.

“How many times has that happened this year?” Long asked. “I hate that the season is over. My goal was to make it to Walnut Creek for the final four. I really believed we could have done that. (South Caldwell) played as well as I’ve seen them play. They wanted it and this is the kind of game where you hate to see a loser.”

Shelby Drummonds, who suffered the loss in her final game as a Pioneer, struck out five of the first eight batters she faced, and 10 overall.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

STATE SOFTBALL SCORES:

CLASS 1A: ALLEGHANY 8, AVERY 6

CLASS 3A: ST. STEPHENS 1, WEST HENDERSON 0

CLASS 3A: FRED T. FOARD 2, R.S. CENTRAL 1

CLASS 3A: LAWNDALE BURNS 6, HIBRITEN 1

CLASS 4A: ALEXANDER CENTRAL 16, MOORESVILLE 0

CLASS 4A: SOUTH CALDWELL 5, WATAUGA 4

STATE BASEBALL SCORES (SECOND-ROUND GAMES):

CLASS 3A: SOUTH POINT 4, FRED T. FOARD 0

CLASS 3A: HICKORY 5, ASHEVILLE ERWIN 1

STATE SOCCER SCORES (THIRD-ROUND GAMES):

CLASS 3A: ST. STEPHENS 3, SOUTH POINT 0

CLASS 3A: HICKORY 4, HIBRITEN 3

CLASS 1A: AVERY 3, UNION ACADEMY 0