

Pirates Sink Pioneers, 1-0

Written by Mike Kelly
Saturday, 21 May 2011 11:44

The Watauga High baseball team's magical run in the state playoffs came to an end Friday night.

The Pioneers (18-8) were derailed by Luke Kwisnik, who handcuffed WHS in the Class 4A Western Quarterfinals. Kwisnik scattered six hits and struck out ten as Porter Ridge defeated WHS 1-0 in Indian Trail.

Jake Watts, who came into the game with microscopic 0.59 earned-run-average in his previous four appearances, threw a gem in the losing cause. Watts went the distance and gave up an unearned run on six hits with a walk and four strikeouts. Unfortunately, the Pioneers couldn't support his effort. The game's only run scored in the third inning on a throwing error by shortstop Max Linville. With a runner at first and two outs, Sergio Patsy hit a slow high chopper on the infield grass. Linville charged, double-clutched and made a bad throw to first that rolled into right field. Courtesy runner Avery Thompson, running for Josh Roeder, who reached with a two-out single that kept the inning alive, scored all the way from first base, giving the Pirates a 1-0 lead.

"Max Linville is a great baseball player," said acting head coach Dustin Kerley, who was filling in for head coach Pete Hardee (Hardee was attending his daughter's wedding). "It was a tough play, and if it happened again, he probably doesn't make that throw. But when the game is on the line, he's the guy you want the ball hit to. He's tough and he'll be all right.

"It was a great ball game. We came up a little short. We left too many men on base, and we ran into a quality pitcher tonight. He mixed things up early in the count, and that's tough to beat." The Pioneers had their chances. They left nine men on base, four of those in scoring position. But Kwisnik (6-2), who came into the game with a 0.92 ERA, found ways to wriggle off the hook. And the Pirates (17-9), riding an 11-game winning streak, have prided themselves on superb pitching and winning close games. They won three consecutive one-run games to win the Southern Carolina Conference tournament, and in three state playoff games, the Pirates have given up one run in 21 innings of work (0.33 ERA).

And Kwisnik, who will attend UNC-Pembroke next season, threw his second shutout in the state playoffs. He threw 110 pitches, 73 of those for strikes.

"That's a typical outing for Luke," said second-year Porter Ridge coach Trey Staviski. "Throwing about a hundred pitches or so an outing is the norm for him. I wasn't worried about taking him out, especially in the late innings. It was his game to win, and our pitching has been real strong in the state playoffs. Heck, we have 36 strikeouts in three games. I'll take that."

The Pirates are also in the western semifinals for the second year in a row. They travel to T.C.Roberson Tuesday night. The Rams, who were western finalists in 2010, defeated Mallard Creek 11-10 in eight innings. The Rams blew a 9-0 lead in that game. And the Rams defeated Porter Ridge 10-0 in the western semis last season.

For WHS, making its first trip to the western quarters for the first time since 2008 and for only

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the third time since 1999, a great run came to an end. The loss also snapped a season-best seven-game winning streak.

Ryan Turner and Linville were WHS's most productive hitters on Friday. They had four of the six hits. But two of those hits were infield singles.

"We had our chances, but (Kwisnik) found ways to get us out," Kerley said. "It hurts, and when it hurts like this it tells you just how hard our guys worked, and what being here meant to our program."

Watts and the WHS defense did their best to keep things close. Matt Proffitt cut down a runner at the plate in the third inning, wiping out an insurance run for the Pirates; and Watts left an insurance run in scoring position in the last three innings.

"Watauga played one heck of a game," Staviski said. "They're a well-coached team. But I expected a game like this. I couldn't ask for a better effort from Luke Kwisnik. We knew Watauga could hit the ball, and they hit it well tonight. But Luke made some big pitches when he had to, and our defense was solid."

It was a tough way for Watts to finish his career as a Pioneer. The right-hander, who will attend Milligan College this fall, closed out the season with nine wins (he was 9-4) and a 2.20 ERA. And he only gave up two earned runs in his last five appearances (31 2/3 innings for a 0.45 ERA).

"Jake pitched his heart out," Kerley said. "But he's been doing that for us all year. We just couldn't push any runs across. I hate it for him, especially being a senior. But we'll be OK. I'm proud of this team. We had our ups-and-downs this season, but the coaching staff put its back against the wall, and our guys responded. They always found a way to bounce back from adversity. We just came up a little short tonight."

RED TORNADOES ADVANCE

The Hickory High baseball team is the last team standing in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference.

The Red Tornadoes advanced to the Class 3A western semifinals by pounding Enka 14-2 Friday night. Kyle Johnson went 3-3 with six RBI; winning pitcher Robert Whaley scattered four hits and struck out five.

The game was called in the fifth inning because of the ten-run mercy rule. The Red Tornadoes (17-10) take on South Point in the western semifinals Tuesday night at home. Tyler Poole is scheduled starter for Hickory.

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STATE SOCCER

Hickory advanced to the Class 3A Western Finals by knocking off St. Stephens 1-0 Friday night.

The Red Tornadoes, led by former WHS assistant coach Brian Jillings, will be making their second-straight appearances in the west finals. Sarah Henson scored the game's only goal at the 50-minute mark of the second half.

Hickory (16-6-2), the No.2 seed among the Class 3A schools in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference, will play Charlotte Catholic. The contest must be completed by Wednesday. Charlotte Catholic (20-1-3) advanced by defeating Marvin Ridge, 2-1.

STATE SOFTBALL

Chelsea Wilkinson struck out nine batters and allowed one hit as Alexander Central belted T.C. Roberson 10-0 in a five inning game in Taylorsville. Wilkinson also registered the 1,000th strike out of her brilliant career.

She also helped her own cause with two hits and two RBI. The Cougars (26-1) take on North Mecklenburg (24-3) in the Class 4A Western Quarterfinals Tuesday night at home. North Meck advanced by knocking off Hopewell 10-1 in Huntersville.

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FRIDAY'S GAMES:

BASEBALL:

WESTERN QUARTERFINAL GAMES:

CLASS 4A: PORTER RIDGE 1, WATAUGA 0

CLASS 4A: T.C. ROBERSON 11, MALLARD CREEK 10 (EIGHT INNINGS)

CLASS 3A: HICKORY 14, ENKA 2 (FIVE INNINGS)

SOCCER:

WESTERN SEMIFINAL GAMES:

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CLASS 3A: HICKORY 1, ST. STEPHENS 0

CLASS 3A: CHARLOTTE CATHOLIC 2, MARVIN RIDGE 1

SOFTBALL:

WESTERN SECOND ROUND GAMES:

CLASS 4A: LAKE NORMAN 9, SOUTH CALDWELL 1

CLASS 4A: ALEXANDER CENTRAL 10, T.C. ROBERSON 0 (FIVE INNINGS)

CLASS 3A: FRED T. FOARD 12, SOUTH POINT 2 (SIX INNINGS)

CLASS 3A: CREST 3, ST. STEPHENS 2

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