

## Pudney Signs With Wasps

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 30 January 2013 10:20

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When it comes to playing softball, Watauga High senior Riley Pudney can't get enough. She's been playing the game for 14 years, and through all that time,

Pudney had one goal in mind, getting the chance to play in college.

Well her efforts finally paid off when she signed her National Letter of Intent Tuesday with Emory & Henry College, a Division III school in Emory, Va., and a member of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference.

"It feels awesome that all my hard work paid off," Pudney said, who moved to Boone from Plantation, Fla., her freshman year. "Knowing I am needed and wanted somewhere is special. It feels amazing to have this all pay off."

And her tireless work ethic backboned her drive dating back to tee ball. There was always something to learn, something to brush up on, something that could only be perfected through hard work and dedication.

"That's why she is the leader of this team," said WHS coach Stephanie Long-Kostis. "Riley has become known as a passionate player who will give one-hundred percent at all time, no matter what the team needs, she is willing to give everything she has. She is a versatile player who has seen

every position except catcher during her career. Whatever the team needs, she is there to fill." Pudney, who has worn a number of hats for the Pioneers in her four-year varsity career, has been recruited as a shortstop. Ironically, Pudney hasn't played that position much at all the last two years with fellow senior Taylor Drummonds handling that position. But Pudney feels playing a variety of positions, including spending some time on the mound, has really given her a better understanding of the game.

"I definitely won't pitch in college," Pudney said. "Playing a lot of positions, I've been able to see the game in different ways. Shortstop is different from third base, and third base is different from second base. It makes you think about scenarios differently and work with other parts of the team definitely. But I've always seen myself as an infield player. I can play anywhere I'm needed, and shortstop on that team is the position for me."

"Emory and Henry will be looking to her as a shortstop because of her range, quickness, and her arm," said Long-Kostis. "But she would be successful at the college level at any position in the field. She is a true student of the game, constantly studying, asking questions, researching, and watching. And Emory & Henry is the perfect fit for her. It's such a good fit that she will wear number 99 (her jersey number at WHS) next season."

Pudney has also established herself as a consistent hitter at the plate. She batted .400 last season with a .463 on-base percentage, and a .617 slugging percentage. And with Drummonds leading off, it gives WHS a solid one-punch at the top of the lineup.

"I love (Drummonds) leading off and me batting second," Pudney said. "What teams don't understand is that her and I have a secret language when we're on base. She takes a big lead, I attract the throw, and she takes off. It's worked real well for us the last two years."

"She is notorious for finding any way to get on base," Long-Kostis said. "She has a keen eye at the plate and understands how pitchers try to set her up. She takes every pitch of every game as a personal challenge to be the absolute best she can be. A strong base hitter, she is fast

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enough that she can beat out just about anything she puts in play. When she is on the base path, she is one of the most instinctive players on the team."

Pudney is also the second WHS player to sign with a college program this season. Teammate, and her best friend, Kim Robinson signed with Lenior-Rhyne University in December. And with five seniors in the team, Pudney isn't pulling any punches.

She really feels WHS can make some noise in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference standings this season.

"We're definitely going to make a run for states," Pudney said. "We have five seniors on this team, and we want to go out with a bang. And we're going to beat Alexander Central this year. It's not a matter of if, but when. We're confident in ourselves and I feel we have the girls to beat them."

And with Pudney's drive and determination, I would take those words to heart.