

Sturgill, Jones, Power WHS To Victory

Written by Mike Kelly

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A bad start doesn't necessarily mean a bad finish. That was certainly the case Saturday afternoon at Carl Sapp Field in Winston-Salem, N.C. The Watauga High baseball team spotted Mount Tabor a 4-0, first-inning lead, and then rallied to win the game, 8-4.

The Pioneers (2-5) snapped a two-game losing streak, they pounded out a season-high 14 hits, and they also broke a two-game slide against the Spartans. Mount Tabor (1-6), which reached the Class 4A Western Finals last year, has lost five in a row. Ryder Jones and Tyler Sturgill backboned WHS' comeback effort on Saturday.

Jones had a two-run blast, his first home run of the year, in the third inning that hit the goal post on the football field that is located just behind the right-field wall at Sapp Field. That moon shot jump-started WHS, cutting Mount Tabor's lead in half. The Pioneers added three more runs in the fourth to take the lead for good.

Sturgill's two-run single in the frame plated Chance Richards with the tying run and Tyler Jones with the eventual winning run.

"You never forget tough losses like the last two we've had (against Davie County on Wednesday and Alexander Central on Friday)," Sturgill said. "You just can't blow a six run lead like we did the other night at Davie County. It's unacceptable. We've really been down, and (head) coach (Pete) Hardee was really upset. But he came in with a positive attitude today and really tried to pick us up. He really got us motivated for this one."

Sturgill's two-run homer, his first of the season, in the sixth highlighted a three-run inning and put the game out of reach.

"We did a great job coming back," Hardee said. "It was a tough start, that's for sure. I was wondering if we had what it took to come back, especially the way things have been going of late. But our guys started swinging the bats in the third inning, Once we started hitting, I felt confident about our chances."

Tyler Jones continued his hot hitting. He was 3-4 with a double and two runs scored. Jones has eight hits in his last three games. Ryder Jones was 1-2 with three runs-batted-in; Strugill was 3-4 and drove in four runs; Jesse Illich was 3-3; Mason Illich was 2-4 with a double, an RBI and a run scored.

"We changed up the lineup a little bit," Hardee said. "And the credit goes to (Appalachian State University head coach Billy) Jones. He suggested after our game Friday night (against Alexander Central) that we should move Ryder up in the batting order to get him started offensively. So we had him batting second today, and Mason batting third. And it paid off. They've got to pitch to Ryder. And with Tyler hitting like he is, it puts a lot of pressure on the opposing pitcher."

Tripp Taylor, who coughed up four runs, all earned, on four hits, in the first inning, settled down and carried WHS into the fifth inning. Taylor (1-0), who made his first start in two years, picked up the win. He gave up seven hits, walked four and struck out four. Andrew Miller came on in

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relief with one on and nobody out in the fifth. He allowed two base runners in his two-plus innings of work, earning his first save.

The Spartans got two runners on in the seventh with two outs, but he retired Cory Matherly on a ground ball to short to end the game.

"Tripp didn't have his best stuff today, but he toughed it out," Hardee said. "Tripp's a senior and he has such a great attitude. Miller was super in relief. He got a double play ball right after he came in, and he basically shut them done."

Dakota Devine (0-2 with a save) suffered the loss for Mount Tabor. The right hander, who picked up a save against WHS in a 3-2 win back on February 28, coughed up five runs on ten hits in 3.1 innings. Ryder Jones' towering drive was the beginning of the end for Devine.

Devine highlighted Mount Tabor's four-run first inning with a two-run double off the wall in right field. That blast gave the Spartans an early 4-0 lead.

"We got around on him the second time around," Hardee said. "We really started stroking the ball, and we hit it hard. It feels great to win this game. What a relief. Now, we can regroup and focus on South (Caldwell)."

"We've got the talent, no doubt about it," Sturgill said. "But Ryder and I haven't been real consistent. Today, we put some hits together. It's a special win, especially to come back like we did."

The Pioneers are scheduled to play South Caldwell Tuesday night. It's suppose to be a home game for the Pioneers, who haven't played a home game all year. But, depending on the weather, the game might be played at South Caldwell. An decision on where the game will be played will be made on Monday. Coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Classic Hits 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The WHS JV team (2-2) defeated Mount Tabor 5-3 in eight innings. Matt Lambert's two-run homer over the left field wall snapped a 3-3 tie in the eighth. The JV team has won two in a row.....The Pioneers hit their first two home runs of the season on Saturday.