

## Richards Shuts Down Black Knights

Written by Mike Kelly

Thursday, 25 April 2013 08:06

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The Watauga High baseball team exemplifies that old Jerry Reed song, "When You're Hot, You're Hot." As a matter of fact, the Pioneers are hotter than the Human Torch from the Fantastic Four (a fictional superhero team appearing in comic books published by Marvel Comics).

The Pioneers (13-10) won their eighth game in a row Wednesday night as they blasted North Davidson 10-0 in five innings in a non-conference game in Welcome, N.C. The game was called after five innings because of the ten-run mercy rule.

Winning pitcher Chance Richards, going on four days rest, tossed five scoreless innings in the win.

That effort avenged a poor showing against the Black Knight (15-6) in their last meeting (a 10-9 loss at Pioneer Field) back on April 9.

"Chance was great tonight," WHS coach Pete Hardee said. "I was looking to use him for only three or four innings, but he just kept getting stronger as the game went on. He did a great job mixing things up. He's given up just two runs in his last 12 innings. That's big for us with the (Northwestern 3A/4A) conference tournament and the state playoffs coming up."

Richards has been pretty stingy this season to say the least. The senior right hander has given up 13 earned runs in 39 innings this season. He has a 2.33 earned-run-average in nine appearances. Richards coughed up four hits in the first two innings, but escaped without allowing a run. From that point on, he was in complete control retiring the last ten men he faced. "He was able to throw his change up and his breaking ball early in the count," said North Davidson coach Mike Meadows. "We had a couple of hard hits off of him early, but he got us to pop up, and he got us to chase in the later innings. If we get a couple of hits in those first two innings, it may have changed things. We saw him earlier at Watauga, but he threw a little more off speed tonight. He threw with confidence and made some good pitches."

The Pioneers gave Richards all the runs he needed in the first inning. Losing pitcher Luke Hutson (0-1) walked two men and hit a batter, loading the bases with one out. Mason Illich came through as he drilled a two-two pitch into left-center field for a two-run single. Illich was 2-2 on the night with a team-high four runs-batted-in.

The Pioneers added two more runs in the third before they broke the game open with a five spot in the fourth.

"Pete's guys are really swinging the bat good," Meadows said. "We always seem to jump start those guys. Every time we beat them, they seem to get hot. What are they (11-1), something ridiculous like that. They're getting hot at the right time."

It was WHS' third win by the mercy rule in the last four days. And the Pioneers have scored 49 runs during that stretch. The blowout win also spoiled "Senior Night" for the Black Knights.

"Mike played some seniors that usually don't start," Hardee said. "But it's still North Davidson, and they're still a very good team that contends every year in their (Central Piedmont 4A) conference. Playings teams like this prepares your guys for what's up ahead in the state playoffs. They won't get intimidated playing against quality teams."

WHS pounded out ten hits. Tyler Jones was 2-3 with a home run (his second of the year) and two RBI; Ryder Jones had an RBI double; Carson Isaacs, despite a bruised hand (he was injured in Tuesday's win against Hibriten) was 2-3 with a double and two RBI; Utah Jones and Matt Lambert drove in a run apiece.

The Pioneers also broke a personal three-game losing streak against the Black Knights.

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Ironically, the Pioneers beat the Black Knights on the road by an 11-1 score in 2011. David Martin, now a freshman at Lenior-Rhyne University, had a grand slam in that game.

The Pioneers return home to play St. Stephens Friday night on "Senior Night." Ryder Jones will get the starting nod. Coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Classic Hits 100.7 FM.

"We've got a lot of momentum right now," Hardee said. "We want to keep this streak going and carry it into the conference tournament (which begins next Tuesday). We're playing real relaxed right now. The guys are just having a lot of fun."

### **NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE**

#### **WEDNESDAY'S GAMES**

**WATAUGA 10, NORTH DAVIDSON 0**

ST. STEPHENS 5, NEWTON-CONOVER 2

FRED T. FOARD 8, MAIDEN 3

NORTH LINCOLN @ ALEXANDER CENTRAL, CANCELLED