

## Jones Ties School HR Record, WHS Wins Again

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 01 May 2013 08:11

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As the late Jim Croce song goes, "You don't spit in the wind, you don't tug on Superman's cape, you don't pull the mask off the Lone Ranger," and you sure as heck don't pitch to Watauga High senior Ryder Jones.

Jones, who transferred in from Stillwater, OK., when his father, Billy, was named the new baseball coach at Appalachian State University last summer, is showing off his talents on a regular basis these days. Jones tied the single-season home-run record off 11 in a season, set by Jonathan Greene in 2004, and he also set a school record with two grand slams in a season by a single player as the Pioneers (15-10) blasted St. Stephens 15-3 in the opening round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament at Pioneer Field Tuesday night. The game was called after 4 1/2 innings because of the ten-run mercy rule.

Jones' grand slam capped off an 11-run third inning as the Pioneers belted the Indians (12-10) for the second time in four days. They beat St. Stephens 12-0 last Friday on Senior Night. They outscored the Indians 27-3 in those two games. The win moves WHS into a semifinal showdown with South Caldwell Friday at MSDeal Stadium in Granite Falls, N.C. The Spartans defeated Hibriten 8-2 Tuesday night.

"I'm not too surprised that teams are pitching to me," Ryder Jones said. "That's because the rest of our team is hitting as well. So, if you want to walk me, fine. The guys behind me are hitting the ball pretty well. We're just hot right now, and we're playing with a lot of confidence."

"Ryder has made us a much better team by just practicing with him," WHS coach Pete Hardee said. "A lot of our guys are gaining a lot of confidence by just watching him. They're saying, 'hey, if this cat can do it, then I can do it.' It's a different thing, but it pushes them. Our players are trying to keep up with him. It's a good situation."

Ryder Jones, who was 3-3 and was a triple shy of hitting for the cycle with a single, a double and a walk with five runs-batted in, now had 11 home runs and 43 RBI. But he wasn't alone. The Pioneers hit three home runs against four St. Stephens pitchers.

Tyler Sturgill belted a two-run homer (his fourth of the year) in the third inning. He finished with three RBI. And Carson Isaacs hit his first home run of the year, a two-run shot, in the second inning. Isaacs, who also had a double among his two hits, also drove in three runs. Tyler Jones drove in two runs and scored twice.

"Playing with Ryder is great," Carson Isaacs said. "He makes some outstanding plays in the field. He's just given us so much confidence. When he gets a hit, or gets on base, he looks at us like, 'hey, I'm on base, but I can't do it alone. It's up to you guys to drive me in.' He's given us a bigger challenge to drive him in."

Hunter Isaacs (3-0) went the distance and got the win. But the youngster struggled a bit. He coughed up three runs, all earned, on eight hits, including four consecutive two-out singles in the top of the third that gave the Indians a 3-2 lead.

Hunter Isaacs, who came in with a 1.27 earned-run-average, walked two, hit a batter and struck out three.

"He was kinda laying his curve ball in there, instead of cutting it in there," Hardee said. "The reason I was patient with Hunter is because we had his bat in the line up. And I was confident we were going to score some runs. He worked out of some jams, and that should help him grow as a pitcher on the mound."

The Pioneers will play the Spartans Friday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. (coverage begins at 4 p.m. on Classic Hits 100.7 FM). It's the third meeting between the schools this season. The Spartans

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(12-9 and the No.2 seed in the tournament) rallied from a 5-0 deficit and defeated WHS 10-7 in Sawmills on March 19; the Pioneers evened the score by knocking off South Caldwell 3-2 at ASU a month later. Tripp Taylor picked up the win with two-plus innings of scoreless relief in that game, and Hunter Isaacs picked up the save.

"It really doesn't matter who we play right now," Ryder Jones said. "It's baseball, and a field is a field. We just have keep throwing strikes, keep hitting the ball like we are, and everything will take care of itself."

"It's going to be hard on Friday," Hardee said. "we'll go with Ryder Friday night. We've had some battles with South Caldwell in the past. They're a solid program. The (Class) 4A schools (including Alexander Central) in this conference have a great baseball tradition. I'm not surprised we're grouped together again. We've got to win the tournament to make the state playoffs. Our guys know it. It's going to a huge challenge, but we're playing our best baseball of the season right now."

**NOTES:** The Pioneers have won ten in a row and 13 of their last 14 games....WHS has hit a school record three grand slams this season. Sturgill hit a grand slam against Fred T. Foard on April 17 at ASU.....WHS has won four games in a row by the ten-run mercy rule, a school record.....The Pioneers also tied a school record as 16 men batted in the third inning of Tuesday night's game. The Pioneers set the record against Fred T. Foard in a 24-9 win on April 17 at ASU....The Pioneers won the NW3A/4A Conference Tournament in 2011. They lost to Hickory in the semifinals last season....If WHS does win the conference tournament, the Pioneers will knock South Caldwell out of the state playoffs. The Spartans haven't missed the state playoffs since 1985.

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

#### **TUESDAY'S GAMES**

**WATAUGA 15, ST. STEPHENS 3**

FRED T. FOARD 2, HICKORY 1

SOUTH CALDWELL 8, HIBRITEN 2

ALEXANDER CENTRAL - BYE

#### **FRIDAY'S SEMIFINAL ROUND**

**MSDEAL STADIUM**

**GRANITE FALLS, N.C.**

**WATAUGA v. SOUTH CALDWELL, 4:30 P.M.**

FRED T. FOARD v. ALEXANDER CENTRAL, 7 P.M.

#### **SATURDAY'S CHAMPIONSHIP GAME, 7 P.M.**