

## PIONEERS v. ALEXANDER CENTRAL BASEBALL

Written by Mike Kelly  
Monday, 30 March 2009 02:59

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Who: Watauga High Baseball.

What: The Pioneers begin the day in first place in the Northwestern 4A Conference.

Where: v. Alexander Central in Taylorsville.

Air-time: 6:05 pm on 100.7, MAC-FM

This has been a heated rivalry for years. And tonight's game should be no different. The Pioneers (7-2 overall; 4-1 NW4A), riding a four-game winning streak, begin the day with a half-game lead on South Caldwell and McDowell for first place.

Right-hander Cal Hardee (3-0, 1.56 earned-run-average) will be on the mound for WHS. The Cougars (5-4; 2-2 NW4A), who had their game at Hibriten rained out last night, begin the night in a two-way tie for fourth place with A.C. Reynolds.

And it's the beginning of a new era for Alexander Central. Jason Harris, who played his high school baseball at St. Stephens and was a stellar first baseman at Clemson University in the

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Atlantic Coast Conference, takes over the program for Gary Comer, who resigned last summer. And Harris takes over a Cougars team that's coming off its first losing season since 2002.

The Cougars were 10-13, and they were a fourth seed in the NW4A last spring. The Pioneers beat Alexander Central 12-6 in Taylorsville to claim the number three seed. And current senior Jake Wallace had his best game as a Pioneer with two hits, a towering home run and five runs-batted-in. As a matter of fact, the Pioneers have won two of their last three meetings in Taylorsville.

The Cougars are young. There's only four seniors on the team, and five sophomores. But the Cougars are blessed with great team speed and a strong baseball tradition. Josh Fox, Dylan Tedder and Logan Chapman are their top returnees. Irvin Francisco is their top pitcher. He has worked his way into become a college prospect. Francisco throws strikes, and he can get people out. But the Pioneers did touch him up for four earned runs last year in one-third innings of work (28.00 ERA).

Francisco defeated Freedom in his last outing on March 24th, but he also has a loss (to East Burke) and a no decision (against McDowell) in his previous two appearances. And the Cougars have struggled offensively, scoring 11 runs in their last five games.