The Watauga High baseball team won its first Northwestern 4A Conference regular-season championship since 2001 as the Pioneers (15-6 overall; 10-2 NW4A) out-slugged Alexander Central 13-9 at WHS-High Field on Tuesday night.

Jon Sharpe, who is still nursing a tender arm, went 4 2/3 innings and got the win, his seventh of the year. Sharpe struck out eight men, and only gave up four earned runs before he ran out of gas. Cal Hardee came on in relief and finished up for his first save of the year.

The heroes were many for WHS. The Pioneers pounded out 13 hits, but it was the lower part of the batting order that got WHS jump started in the fourth as the trio of Phil Gordon, Chris Shelton and Jake Wallace ignited a five-run rally. That gave WHS a 6-3 lead and the Pioneers, despite some anxious moments, hung on for the win.

Baine Martin, Hardee , Adam Church, and Kyle Miller each had two hits apiece. Hardee, Church, David Martin, Miller and Trey Lowder each drove in two runs each.

The Pioneers now own the No.1 seed in the NW4A as they make their way to the conference tournament, which begins next week at Deal Stadium in Granite Falls, NC. A starting time and an opponent are yet to be determined. But with the top seed, it's very possible, the Pioneers could play A.C. Reynolds or East Burke in that first game.

In other games last night, South Caldwell defeated A.C. Reynolds 7-0 down in Sawmills; McDowell blasted Freedom 17-0 in Morganton. The Patriots, who haven't won a conference game since 2007, have now lost 24 consecutive league games.

NOTES: Jon Sharpe (7-2, two saves, a 2.86 earned-run-average with 72 strike outs in 58-plus innings of work) has announced that he will verbally commit to Spartanburg Methodist College, a two-year school in Spartanburg, SC on Friday. But Appalachian State is still a possibility. If not next year, then following his stay at Spartanburg. And the NW4A tournament could announce a scheduling change in the next few days. The tournament is slated to begin on Thursday, May 7th and run through Saturday, May 9th. But the schedule may be altered for rain. There is nothing official as of yet, but there is talk the tournament could begin on Tuesday, May 5th with an off day on Wednesday, May 6th. The semi-finals would be played on Thursday, May 7th and the finals on Friday, May 8th with Saturday, May 9th being used as a rain date

And remember, if WHS and South Caldwell meetin the tournament championship game next week, regardless of what happens, WHS will maintain the No.1 seed in the state playoffs from

the NW4A. The Pioneers will open the state playoffs at home on Friday, May 15th against the No.5 seed from the Southwestern 4A Conference. Weddington, South Mecklenburg and Butler are possible opponents in the first round.