The Watauga High baseball team marched its way into the Northwestern 4A Conference championship game on Friday afternoon as the Pioneers blasted East Burke 9-4 in the semi-final round.

The Pioneers (17-6 overall and the No.1 seed) will play South Caldwell (18-4 and the No.2 seed) in the finals on Saturday night in a rematch of last year's title game. The Spartans, who are making their sixth consecutive appearance in the finals and riding a four-game winning streak in the championship round, advanced by beating A.C, Reynolds 7-2 in Friday's second semi-final game.

Cal Hardee, who coughed up three runs in the first inning, settled down and went the distance. The right-hander, who improved his record to 4-1 on the year, gave up four runs, all earned, on eight hits, he struck out four and walked three. The Pioneers, who only made eight hits themselves, took advantage of some sloppy pitching by the Cavaliers.

Losing pitcher Kyle Van Horn and Bryson Cook, who came on in relief in the third inning, coughed up seven walks and hit five batters.

Baine Martin had a huge game. He was only a home run shy of hitting for the cycle. His first-inning triple jump-started WHS's offense. Martin finished three for five with three stolen bases and four runs scored. Hardee finished with two hits and three runs-batted-in. Adam Church had a double, a solo home run (his seventh of the year) and drove in two runs. Matt Phillips and Kyle Miller each drove in a run a piece. David Martin had an RBI single. He also walked three times, once intentionally.

Our coverage of the NW4A title game begins at 7 pm on 100.7, MAC-FM. Also, Andy Fox will make his varsity head-coaching debut in this game. WHS coach Pete Hardee will be attending his daughter's graduation at North Carolina State in Raleigh. Hardee plans on attending the game, buit at an unspecified time.