Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High baseball team snapped its five-game losing streak in convincing fashion Friday night.

The Pioneers, suffering throught their longest drought in nine years, pounded A.C. Reynolds 16-6 at Watauga-High Field.

The game was called in the sixth inning because of the 10-run mercy rule. The Pioneers (9-8) pounded out a season-high 18 hits, and they broke the game open with a six-run, fifth inning.

"We did a good job swinging the bats tonight," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "We got people on base and we moved them around. It's a big win for us with South Caldwell coming to town Tuesday night."

Josh Wyant and Ryan Turner did the bulk of the damage. Those two combined for eight hits and seven runs-batted-in. Wyant was 4-5 with four RBI; Turner was 4-5 and drove in three runs.

"This was a big win for us," said Wyant. "We really needed it for our confidence. We've been playing some very good teams and coming up short. Losing three in a row at the Easter tournament was tough to take, but we were in all of those games."

But, as was the case during this five-game losing streak, the Pioneers fell behind early and had to battle back. Only this time, WHS managed to pull it off.

Phillip Treadway of the Rockets (8-7) belted a two-run homer in the first giving A.C. Reynolds an early 2-0 lead. A double by Turner and a run-scoring single by Wyant in the second inning cut the lead to one. But with two outs in the third, the Rockets. who have lost seven of their last nine games following a 6-0 start, added two more runs on Treadway's run-scoring double and Ryan Jones' RBI single. That put WHS in a 4-1 hole.

"But we never panicked," said Wyant. "We knew we could come back. We've seen some good pitchers this year, and we knew we could score some runs against these guys."

From that point on, the Pioneers took control. They finally took their first lead of the game at 6-5 on Matt Proffitt's run-scoring double in the fifth inning. Proffitt, who was ninth in the batting order, reached base four times. He had two doubles, scored four runs and drove in a run.

"We were at the Easter tournament on Tuesday against D.H.Conley, and both of us are 0-2 in a seventh-place game, and we see their ace, who has signed with East Carolina (University)," said Hardee. "So we know what it takes to face a good pitcher. We're patient, and you won't blow it by us. Now, the curve (ball) has given us problems, but for the most part, we don't strike out a lot."

And the Pioneers also took advantage of eight walks. Six of those walks came around to score. Meanwhile, WHS pitcher Jake Watts, who got off to a rocky start, settled down, went the distance and picked up his third win of the year.

"What more can I say about Jake Watts (who is 3-2 on the year)," said Hardee. "He won't blow you away out there, but he is so efficient. He moves the ball around well,

and he's always getting in front of the hitters for the most part."

And Watts shook off the effects of Watauga's marathon inning in the fifth. After he surrendered back-to-back hits by Derick Anderson and Tyler Pressley to start the frame, he settled down and gave up one run before the retired the side.

"I was worried how the long inning, especially on a cold night (upper 30s with a stiff breeze) like this would affect him," said Hardee. "But he fought through it. Jake is a fighter, and he won't give in to the hitters. He makes them earn it."

The Pioneers, who will play all but one game at home during the month of April, get set for a huge showdown Tuesday night against South Caldwell. The Spartans (12-3) begin second-half play tied with Alexander Central for first place in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference.

The Pioneers begin the second-half in third place, just one-and-a-half games off the lead.

"The expectations weren't there when the season began," said Hardee. "I think we started pressing a little bit when we found ourselves near in the top in the conference. But this is strong group. The key is to play relaxed and just have fun.

"And I love it when South (Caldwell) comes to town. It's a huge rivarly, and believe me, it will be a battle Tuesday night."

Our coverage of that game begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: South Caldwell lost to Kings Mountain 12-4 Friday night in the championship game of the First National Bank Easter Tournament in Shelby, NC.....Hibriten split a pair of games at the Major Larry J. Bauguess Tournament in Moravian Falls. The Panthers defeated Statesville 5-4 in their first game; but they lost to Wilkes Central 9-1. The Panthers play South Iredell to wrap up the tournament on Saturday at 2:30 pm.