The Watauga High baseball team pulled itself into a three-way tie for first place in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Friday night.

And the Pioneers (14-8 overall; 8-2 in conference play), riding a six-game winning streak, did it impressively by knocking off one of the hottest teams in the league. WHS wiped out an early 2-0 deficit and defeated Alexander Central 6-3 at Watauga-High Field.

The win coupled with South Caldwell's 10-0 blowout win over Fred T. Foard pulls the Pioneers, the Spartans and the Cougars (13-8) into a three-way tie for first place. All those teams are 8-2 with two games left in the regular season.

"We're just taking it seven innings at a time," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "The reason we went into that five-game slump (from April 2-7) is because we started putting too much stress on ourselves worrying about where we stood in the conference.

"Now, it's just another seven innings we have to work through. And our guys are more relaxed and playing with more confidence."

But the Pioneers, who have developed a knack for dramatic comebacks this season, played out that same script against the Cougars. They spotted Alexander Central a 2-0 lead in the second inning. A lead-off single by Tyler Pennell and a towering double off the center-field wall by Logan Galliher put runners at second and third with nobody out. A sacrifice fly by Tyler Gilleland and a run-scoring single by Avery Hall plated two runs.

The Pioneers picked up a run without the benefit of a hit in the bottom of the second. A pair of walks and a sacrifice bunt by Josh Wyant led to Tyler Jones' run-producing, sacrifice fly. The Pioneers finally errupted for three runs in the fourth to take the lead for good.

And it all happened with two outs. A double by Matt Proffitt and an infield single by Ethan Critcher got the rally started. Max Linville, Cal Hardee and David Martin each drove in a run and gave WHS a 4-2 lead.

"The lower part of the order is doing a great job setting us up," said Martin, who had another productive day with two hits, an RBI and a run scored. "Those guys are getting on and they're giving us a chance to drive them in."

Dylan Norris, who battled his way into the sixth inning, got the win, his team-leading sixth of the year. He gave up three earned runs on seven hits, and the Cougars hit him pretty hard all night.

"But he got us into the sixth inning," Hardee said. "I know, I've been there. As a pitcher, on some nights, your stuff just isn't working the way you want. So you have to pitch and move the ball around.

"And Dylan did that. They hit him hard, but he kept them in the park and it gave us a chance."

Jake Watts came on in relief in the sixth following back-to-back doubles by Lukas LaSalle and Will Marlowe that narrowed Watauga's lead at 5-3. But Watts, who gave up two hits, struck out

two and picked up his first save of the year.

"They couldn't touch his slider, " Martin said. "It was tailing away from them. Jake's done a great job for us."

And Hardee feels with Watts in the mix, WHS has a pretty deep pitching staff.

"He gives us another solid arm," said Hardee. "He's gone up against a lot of tough teams, so he's not afraid in situations like this. He went right after their hitters tonight."

The Pioneers take on Hickory Tuesday night. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Losing pitcher Jon Millsaps is now 0-2 against WHS in his career.....He had a no-hitter going until David Martin's hot smash up the middle in the third inning, hit Millsaps in the leg and bounced into foul territory.....Millsaps walked five and hit a batter.....In all, the Cougars walked seven men.....The Pioneers have now won four in a row against the Cougars.....The Cougars are also enjoying their first winning season in three years, but Friday's loss snapped their four-game winning streak.....The Cougars return home to play South Caldwell Tuesday night.....Alexander Central beat South Caldwell 8-2 on April 2.....In other games Friday night, Hickory defeated St. Stephens 4-1 in eight innings, and Wilkes Central blasted Hibriten 10-0 in six innings in a non-conference game. The Panthers have lost five straight.