Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High baseball team continued its march towards a conference championship on Wednesday night at Watauga-High Field.

Trailing 4-1 in the bottom of the third, the Pioneers errupted for 11 runs in the bottom of the third and destroyed Hickory 15-5 in five innings by the 10-run mercy rule. The Pioneers (15-8 overall; 9-2 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference), riding a seven-game winning streak, sent 16 men to the plate.

They had seven hits in the inning, and they took advantage of six walks in the frame. Losing pitcher Tyler Poole, who lost his control in the third, walked four in a row during one stretch with two outs in the inning. Cal Hardee and David Martin did the bulk of the damage for WHS. Those two combined for seven runs-batted-in on the night. Martin had four RBI; Hardee had three.

The Pioneers remain in the two-way tie for first place as South Caldwell outlasted Alexander Central 10-7 in ten innings in Taylorsville. Bryson Bowman's three-run homer in the tenth won it for South. Jon Millsaps, who coughed up the home-run ball, was tossed when he threw two pitches behind the next scheduled hitter.

The Pioneers own the tie breaker against the Spartans, and a win Friday night against St. Stephens would give WHS back-to-back conference championships for the first time since 1998 and 1999.

As a matter of fact, the Pioneers won four consecutive Northwestern 4A titles from 1997-2001, which also included two tournament championships in 1999 and 2000. Our coverage for Friday's game against St. Stephens begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM. Dylan Norris, who is 6-2, gets the starting nod for the Pioneers.