

Pioneers will face Hickory on Thursday

Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High baseball team knows who it will play on Thursday in the semi-final round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament in Granite Falls.

The Pioneers (16-8), and the No.1 seed in the field, will take on Hickory at 4:30 pm Thursday afternoon. The Red Tornadoes (15-9), the No.4 seed, advanced by knocking off Fred T. Foard 5-2 in a first-round game Tuesday night.

It will be the third meeting between the schools this season. The Pioneers bested Hickory 2-1 on the road in their first meeting back on March 26. The Pioneers scored two unearned runs off losing pitcher Tyler Barnette in that game. Cal Hardee went the distance, struck out 11 and got the win.

WHS won their final regular-season meeting between the schools by the ten-run mercy rule on April 27 in Boone. The Pioneers scored 11 runs in the third inning and sent 16 men to the plate as they battered Hickory, 15-5.

The winner of this game will advance to the finals Friday night at 7 pm. The WHS-Hickory winner will play either St. Stephens or South Caldwell in the championship game. The Indians, who nearly derailed WHS last Friday night, pounded Alexander Central 16-7 Tuesday night. South Caldwell blasted Hibriten 14-3 in Sawmills.

St. Stephens and South Caldwell will play the late game on Thursday at 7 pm.

And the No. 1 seed among the Class 4A schools is also at stake concerning the state playoffs. WHS must win the tournament (something the Pioneers haven't done since 2000), to clinch that No.1 seed. Remember, WHS and South Caldwell split their two regular-season meetings. But if South Caldwell and the Pioneers are both eliminated in the semi-finals Thursday night, then they must play a one-game playoff Friday to decide the issue.

Earning the No.1 seed means playing at home in the first two rounds of the playoffs (against a wild card team in the opening round and against the No.2 seed from the Mountain Athletic Conference in the second round). The No.2 seed in the NW3A/4A will play its first two games on the road (at the No.1 from the MEGA 7 in round one, and at the No.1 seed from the Mountain Athletic Conference in the second round).

Our coverage begins at 4 pm Thursday afternoon on Oldies 100.7 FM.

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