

Lake wins regional title, advances to state

Written by Mike Kelly
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Watauga High junior Steve Lake of the men's tennis team marched his way to the state tournament with an impressive performance this weekend.

Lake, who will be our guest on the dug-out show this Friday night when the WHS baseball team begins post-season play, won the Class 4A Western Regional championship on Saturday as he defeated Jim Fan of Myers Park in straight sets, 6-3, 6-2 at Ardrey Kell High School in Charlotte.

It was also Lake's second regional championship in a row. Lake, who won the Western Regional last year, was the No.2 seed. He will now advance to the state tournament, which begins Friday at the Burlington Tennis and Recreation Center in Burlington, NC.

"You must respect everyone you play," said Lake, who is now 15-2 playing No.1 singles for the Pioneers this season. "There's a lot of good players out there. You just have to be mentally and physically ready for every match. One letdown and it's over."

Lake defeated Thomas Low of Myers Park, 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 in the semi-finals; he defeated Sawyer Johnston of T.C. Roberson in the first round, 6-0, 6-1.

"It's been a blessing coming from a tennis-playing family," Lake said. "My dad (Bob, the head coach at Appalachian State University), my older brother (Bobby, who was a great player for the Pioneers and won a regional championship), and my uncle (who is still an excellent player in his age group) have really helped me improve my game. I love my family."

The Pioneers had six qualifiers in the field. Michael Smith joined Lake in singles play. And he was the only other Pioneer to win a match.

Smith defeated Tram Tran Viet of Mallard Creek in straight sets, 6-1, 6-1. But he was bested by Timothy Staten-Davis of Independence in the second round, 4-6, 5-7.

The Pioneers also had two doubles teams in the field. Harrison Battle and Ryan Schweitzer lost their first-round match in straight sets, 1-6, 5-7, to Brandon Hoge and Ben Gillespie of T.C. Roberson; Brian and Nathan Geldmeier lost in the opening round to Drew Harmon and Matt Crisp of Lake Norman in straight sets, 1-6, 0-6.

The top four finishers in singles and doubles play advance to state. The state meet begins Friday, May 14, and concludes Saturday, May 15. The WHS men's tennis team will also play Providence in the second-round of the Dual Team State Playoffs Tuesday in Boone.

The Pioneers (15-2), the No.1 seed from the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference, advanced by defeating TCR in the first round last Tuesday. Providence (9-2), the No.2 seed from the Southwestern 4A Conference, advanced by knocking off Hopewell on the road.

The Pioneers defeated Providence 5-4 in the regular season way back on March 17.

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