

Pioneers Face North Davidson In Early-Season Showdown

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 02 March 2011 18:07

The Watauga High baseball team turned in a stellar effort Tuesday night in Asheville.

The Pioneers (1-0) pounded out 14 hits and dismantled A.C. Reynolds 11-4 in their season opener at Davis Field. And now the challenge gets a little stiffer as the Pioneers venture to Lexington Thursday night to take on North Davidson.

The Black Knights, led by head coach Mike Meadows, made it to the third-round of the state playoffs last season. They lost to the eventual state runner-up in East Forsyth. And North Davidson, a member of the Central Piedmont 4A Conference, is loaded with experience. The Black Knights, who play WHS in their season opener Thursday night, are senior heavy this season.

Leading the way is pitcher Jordan Ramsey, who has signed with UNC-Wilmington. He could be selected in the Major League Baseball draft in June. Ramsey was 12-1 last season. He's also throwing in the low 90s, and with the emergence of Clark Beeker, the Black Knights have a solid one-two punch on the mound.

Beeker established himself last summer when he developed into the ace of his American Legion team.

"They have two quality guys in Ramsey and Beeker," WHS coach Pete Hardee said. "And it's always fun playing a team like North Davidson. They're a playoff-quality team, and Mike does a great job getting them ready every year.

"We've had some battles in the past, and Thursday night should be no exception."

The North Davidson game is the second stage of a demanding week for the Pioneers, who close out the week with a road game Saturday in Charlotte against Ardrey Kell, the No.1 team in the state in Class 4A.

"And I like playing teams like this," Hardee said. "When you're in our position, playing teams like this is a good measuring stick for our program. It shows us where we are, and what we need to improve on."

And the Black Knights should prove to be quite a barometer for the Pioneers. Their talent level goes way beyond Ramsey and Beeker. Shortstop Landon Lassiter, who has committed to North Carolina, and Cody Adkins, who has signed with UNC-Asheville, give the Black Knights a solid one-two punch in the batting order.

Both men have power and can hit in the clutch. Add Karsten Miller (the starting quarterback on the football team) to the mix, and the Black Knights can be a nightmare for any opposing pitching staff.

North Davidson has very good team speed, and they're an excellent defensive team.

"They're always loaded with talent every year," Hardee said. "But they also play in a monster conference. They could easily finish third in their league, despite all their talent. West Forsyth and Davie County are in that league and they're pretty solid teams as well.

"But this is a great challenge for our team. Playing these guys doesn't guarantee us a

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(Northwestern 3A/4A) conference championship, but it will prepare us for the big games on our schedule later this season. It's early March, but this game with North Davidson is definitely a playoff-type game."

Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.