

Pioneers Make Huge Statement

Written by Mike Kelly
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The high school baseball season may only two games old, but the Watauga High baseball team is all ready making huge headlines.

The Pioneers (2-0) knocked off North Davidson, one of the premier programs in the state, 11-1 in Welcome, NC, Thursday night. And the Pioneers got the job done in text-book fashion. They hit four home runs, played solid defense and got a great pitching performance from junior righthander Ethan Greene.

Greene, who really came into his own last summer, handcuffed North Davidson's (0-1) hard-hitting lineup, limiting the Black Knights to just four hits in five innings of work.

"Ethan threw a great game," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "He used his change up a lot and that really kept them off balance. (Pitching coach) Cort Radford did a great job calling the pitches and Ethan got the job done. It's was a great effort."

Greene (1-0), who has just given up one earned run with five strikeouts in his first two appearances of the year, had a no-hitter through 3 2/3 innings before Landon Lassiter broke it up with an infield single in the fourth.

Meanwhile, the Pioneers hit two home runs off losing pitcher Jordan Ramsey, who was highly touted coming into his senior year. The righthander, who was 12-1 last season and has signed with UNC-Wilmington, served up a pair of home run balls to David Martin in the first inning, and to Josh Roberts leading off the second.

"That home run by David really set the tone," Hardee said. "It showed North Davidson that we were here to play. And David hit that home run off a great pitcher. Josh had a night as well. it was fun to watch. Our intensity level was real high for this game."

Leading 2-0, the Pioneers finally broke the game open with seven-run explosion in the fifth inning. In all, ten men batted in the frame Ryan Turner had a two-run single that made it 4-0, Garrett McGuire's bloop single against a drawn-in infield scored another run to make it 5-0, and Roberts' grand slam in the very next at bat closed out the assault.

Roberts got on base four times. He was 3-3 with five RBI and a walk.

"Watauga has a very good team," said North Davidson coach Mike Meadows. "I like playing Pete every year. His teams are always very fundamental and strong. They really stroked it tonight."

The Pioneers have now beaten two teams in A.C. Reynolds and North Davidson that made it to the sectional finals last season. And they've scored 22 runs in the process, which includes five home runs. Those numbers rival the 1999 and 2000 WHS teams that, without question, were the best teams in school history.

"I haven't had a team play with this type of intensity and enthusiasm for quite a while," Hardee said. "Our guys were really ready for this game. North Davidson is a solid team, and come playoff time, they'll be there. But this win is huge for us. It gives us a lot of confidence.

"And playing teams like North Davidson, A.C. Reynolds, Ardrey Kell (who the Pioneers play on Saturday) will tell us where we're weak and what we need to work on. It also gives us a chance to play in a great facility, just like the one we played in tonight."

Dylan Norris, whose been battling a twinge in his pitching shoulder, mopped up with two scoreless innings of relief. He only allowed one base runner and struck out three.

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"We're taking things slow with Dylan," Hardee said. "He's a very important part of our team. We don't want to push him too hard until we're sure that his shoulder is completely healed. But he looked very good tonight."

The Pioneers travel to Charlotte to play Ardrey Kell, the No.1 team in the state in Class 4A, on Saturday. They travel to Mount Tabor next Tuesday. Our next broadcast of WHS baseball will be Friday, March 11 when the Pioneers open Northwestern 3A/4A Conference play at South Caldwell. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: After losing to North Davidson in the sectional finals in 2008, the Piioneers have now won two of their last three games at the North Davidson Baseball Complex.....WHS has also won three of the last four meetings between the teams.....Josh Roberts leads the Pioneers with two home runs and six RBI through the first two games of the season.....Ryan Turner has five RBI and a team-leading three stolen bases.....Ethan Greene has only allowed one earned run and five hits in six innings of work. He also has five strikeouts.