

## Pioneers Blank Panthers

Written by Mike Kelly  
Friday, 08 April 2011 22:52

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What a difference 24 hours can make.

The Watauga High baseball team, which had its conference title hopes squelched on Thursday in a lopsided loss at the hands of South Caldwell, bounced back and blanked Hibriten 6-0 on Friday night at Pioneer Field.

Jake Watts, who got knocked around in a losing cause against the Spartans Monday night, fired a four-hit shut against the Panthers. Watts also got a huge helping hand from his defense, which turned three double plays. The first twin-killing snuffed out a two on, nobody out rally by the Panthers in the opening frame.

Third baseman Ethan Critcher smothered a hot smash off the bat of Ethan Turner and turned a five-four-three double play that kept the Panthers off the board.

"Our defense was superb tonight," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "We made some great plays in the field. And I was real proud of Jake. He did a great job attacking their hitters and pitching inside. You've got to establish the inside part of the plate, or you're going to have problems getting people out."

The win also moves WHS (9-4 overall; 5-3 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) into sole possession of second place, two games behind South Caldwell with four regular-season games left in league play. Hickory helped out WHS by knocking off Alexander Central 3-1 on Friday night in Taylorsville.

The Panthers (3-11; 2-7), who fell into last place with Friday night's loss, exemplified a team going through a trying season. The Panthers had four hits in the first two innings. But they had nothing to show for it. They lost a base runner and hit into a pair of double plays.

Tyler Jones made the play of the night as he doubled off Cody Saunders at third base on a great throw from right field in the second inning.

"Tyler just keeps getting better everyday in right field," Hardee said. "He really made a great play cutting that guy down at third. I thought we played very well on defense. I really thought this was our best defensive effort all year."

The Pioneers finally broke the scoreless tie in the third inning. Losing pitcher James Coffey, who retired the first six men he faced, coughed up a lead-off single to Ethan Greene. He was sacrificed to second base by Garrison McGuire, playing his first game since suffering a concussion at St. Stephens on March 29.

Coffey retired Critcher on a comebacker to the mound before Max Linville belted a 3-2 pitch over the left-field wall for a 2-0 lead. WHS broke the game open with a three-run outburst in the fourth.

David Martin, Josh Roberts and Matt Proffitt all singled to load the bases with nobody out. A pair of wild pitches by Coffey scored Martin and Roberts. Proffitt scored on a fielder's choice by Jones to make it 5-0. A sacrifice fly by Roberts in the fifth closed out the scoring.

Watts (4-3), who gave up four hits in the first two innings, settled down and finished strong. The righthander, who defeated Hibriten for the second time this season, only allowed three baserunners in his last five innings of work. He also struck out four men.

"I told our players that this game could be the one that jump starts us into a good little run here," Hardee said. "Hopefully, we can keep this going (Saturday) against Mount Tabor."

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The Pioneers entertain the Spartans Saturday afternoon. Mount Tabor (6-9) has won six of its last nine games following an 0-6 start. The Spartans, who had won four in a row going into their game with Davie County Friday night, were on fire offensively. They've scored 49 runs in their last four games.

Jones or Proffitt are the probable starters for WHS. Our coverage begins at 2 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

**NOTES:** The WHS JV team defeated Hibriten 8-0.....A correction, WHS baseball coach Pete Hardee hopes to play Providence in a double-header, varsity-only game next Saturday at Pioneer Field. But that has not been confirmed as of yet. Right now, the Pioneers are only scheduled to play a single game against Providence next Saturday afternoon.....Friday night's game against Hibriten only took one hours, 36 minutes. It was one of the shortest games of the season.

### NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE:

SOUTH CALDWELL	7-1; 11-1
<b>WATAUGA</b>	<b>5-3; 9-4</b>
HICKORY	5-4; 10-6
ALEXANDER CENTRAL	4-4; 6-8
FRED T. FOARD	4-5; 6-8
ST. STEPHENS	3-6; 4-8
HIBRITEN	2-7; 3-11

### FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

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### **WHS 6, HIBRITEN 0**

HICKORY 3, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 1  
ST. STEPHENS 5, FRED T. FOARD 1

### **SATURDAY'S GAMES:**

#### **MOUNT TABOR @ WHS**

SOUTH CALDWELL @ DRAUGHN  
WEST WILKES @ HIBRITEN