

UPDATED: Pioneers Drop Another One

Written by Mike Kelly
Wednesday, 20 April 2011 07:35

The Watauga High baseball team is caught in a maze at the moment.

No matter what direction the Pioneers seem to take, it leads them to a dead end. And the frustration is beginning to show. The Pioneers, fighting for their post-season lives, were victimized again Tuesday night as they dropped a 5-2 decision to Hickory at Pioneer Field. The loss leaves WHS (10-6 overall; 6-5 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) in a three-way tie for second place with Alexander Central and Hickory. But throw in the tie-breakers, and the Pioneers are currently the No.4 seed with one game left in conference play (Thursday night at home against St. Stephens).

"I don't know what's happening," said WHS junior Max Linville. "We just aren't playing very well right now. Either we're driving in runs and our pitching is struggling, or the pitching is great and we just aren't driving in the runs. We gave up five runs tonight, and that's good enough to win a game."

Unfortunately, the WHS bats were silenced by right-hander Tyler Poole of the Red Tornadoes. Poole, who will play both baseball and basketball at Coastal Carolina next season, went the distance, gave up two runs, scattered three hits and struck out ten. Ironically, Poole, who struggled something awful in his only appearance against WHS last year, had a whopping 25.45 earned-run-average against the Pioneers coming into Tuesday night's game. But Poole (4-3 on the year) was in total command in this one. He retired nine in a row during one stretch, and 14 of 15 men.

"It wasn't that he was tough," Linville said. "He was just throwing to spots, and he kept us off balance. He also kept us off the bases, and when we got people on, we didn't drive them in. It was rough."

Ethan Greene, who really deserved a better fate, suffered the loss. The right-hander, who has been Watauga's most consistent pitcher this season, went 6 2/3 innings, coughed up five runs, all earned, on 12 hits. And the Red Tornadoes (12-7; 6-5) didn't waste any time jumping on Greene in the first inning. Davis Hanvey led things off with a single, and following a sacrifice by Barrett Miller that moved him to second base, he came home to score on Robert Whaley's double. Michael Payne, who was 3-4 on the night, drove in Whaley with an RBI single that gave Hickory an early 2-0 advantage.

The Pioneers responded with a run of their own in the bottom of the first. Ryan Turner, who at the moment is WHS's most consistent hitter, doubled with one out and he came home to score on Josh Robets run-scoring single. But from that point on, Poole shut the door. He finally suffered a letdown when he coughed up a two-out walk to Matt Proffitt in the fourth.

"It's frustrating, that's for sure," said WHS senior Jake Watts. "I can't explain what's going on. We were ranked ninth in the state (by ImpactBaseball.com) at the beginning of the season, and now we're caught in the middle of the standings in our league. We just aren't playing very well." The Red Tornadoes eventually put the game out of reach with two runs in the fourth. Poole

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helped his own cause with an RBI triple; Kyle Johnson followed with an RBI single, which gave Hickory a 4-1 lead. Poole was 2-3 on the night with a run scored and an RBI.

The win also gives Hickory the season-sweep of the Pioneers, and if you go back to the NW3A/4A Conference tournament last year, the Red Tornadoes have now beaten WHS three consecutive times.

"We've been practicing real hard," Linville said. "But we're not getting it done in game situations. We just don't seem to have the intensity. I can't explain it. I'm lost right now."

St. Stephens comes to town Thursday night. It will be Senior Night, and our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The WHS JV team rallied for six runs in the bottom of the fifth and defeated Hickory 11-8.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS:

SOUTH CALDWELL	9-2; 15-2
ALEXANDER CENTRAL	6-5; 9-9
HICKORY	6-5; 12-7
WATAUGA	6-5; 10-6
FRED T. FOARD	5-7; 7-10
ST. STEPHENS	4-7; 5-11
HIBRITEN	3-8; 5-13

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TUESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

HICKORY 5, WATAUGA 2

SOUTH CALDWELL 9, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 3

FRED T. FOARD 4, HIBRITEN 3

WEST FORSYTH 14, ST. STEPHENS 4

THURSDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

ST. STEPHENS @ WATAUGA

HIBRITEN @ ALEXANDER CENTRAL

SOUTH CALDWELL @ HICKORY