

Roberts Has Unforgettable Night

Written by Mike Kelly
Friday, 22 April 2011 08:13

Josh Roberts of the Watauga High baseball team had the best outing of his career Thursday night at Pioneer Field.

Roberts, one of five seniors on the team, turned in a memorable performance on Senior Night as he belted a grand slam (his second of the season) and drove in five runs as the Pioneers blasted St. Stephens, 8-4. The Pioneers (11-6 overall; 7-5 in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) also nailed down the No.3 seed in the NW3A/4A tournament, which begins May 2. And the Pioneers will play the Indians (5-12; 4-8), mired in a three-game losing streak, in the opening round.

And for Roberts, it was one of his greatest efforts on his biggest night as a Pioneer.

"I was a little nervous before the game," he said with a grin on his face. "I knew it was Senior Night, and that this was one of my last games at home. I just wanted to come out and have a big game."

Roberts' big moment came in the fourth inning. With the game tied 3-3, and the bases loaded with two outs, Roberts belted Sawyer Smith's offering over the left -field wall for a 7-3 lead. The ball just did clear the fence behind outfielder Logan Gray, who seemed to lose the ball in its flight.

"It really didn't feel that good when I hit it," Roberts said. "But it managed to make it out. We really needed that as a team. We've been struggling of late, and I'm just glad I made a big play for us."

The Pioneers began the night in a three-way tie with Alexander Central and Hickory for second place. But the tie-breakers were not in Watauga's favor, which made the Pioneers a No.4 seed. And a loss against the Indians would have been devastating.

"We're fighting for our playoff lives," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "Our goal was to get that No.2 seed, but we've lost a couple and things weren't really in our favor. But the guys came through with a big game. We had a meeting at practice (on Thursday), and tried to figure things out. We were playing with a lot of tension of late. We weren't having fun. Tonight, our guys were really loose."

But the Pioneers had their anxious moments. Starting pitcher Jake Watts, who picked up his fifth win of the year, labored into the fifth inning. He coughed up three earned runs and walked five men before giving way to Dylan Norris. The Indians batted around in the top of the third and took a 3-1 lead. WHS rallied to tie the game thanks to a lead-off double by Max Linville, a pair of wild pitches, two walks (one intentional) and two hit batters. Josh Cline, who suffered the loss, scattered three hits, but he was victimized by his lack of control. The right-hander gave up four earned runs, walked three (one intentional), hit three men and threw four wild pitches. Indians' pitching hit four batters on the night.

Norris, who coughed up eight earned runs on 17 hits in three appearances against the Indians in his career, survived a scare in the sixth. With one out, the Indians loaded the bases. A double

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by Phillip Carroll, a walk, a single by Jacob Hoyle and a wild pitch tallied a run, making it 7-4. But Norris struck out the next two hitters to end the threat, and pretty much to end the game. Norris struck out four men in 2 1/3 innings of work.

"I was real proud of Dylan and Jake," Hardee said. "Things haven't gone too well for them in recent games. But they really stepped it up on Senior Night. They really gutted things out on the mound."

The Pioneers travel to Forest City, NC for the East Rutherford Easter Tournament. WHS will play Chase in the opening round Monday afternoon. Our coverage begins at 4:30 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Matt Proffitt homered to lead off the second inning for a 1-0 lead.....Three of Watauga's first four hits were extra base hits---two home runs and a double.....Seniors Dylan Norris, Jake Watts, Seth Sloan, Garrison McGuire and Josh Roberts were honored before the game.....The Pioneers will play St. Stephens in the opening round of the NW3A/4A Conference tournament on May 2. The higher seeds will host first-round games. The semifinals and finals will be played in Granite Falls at M.S. Deal Stadium, Friday and Saturday, May 6-7.....The Pioneers clinched the No.3 seed when South Caldwell defeated Hickory 11-3.....Alexander Central gets the No.2 seed because the Cougars split their season series with Hickory. The Pioneers were swept by the Red Tornadoes in the regular season.....St. Stephens won the JV game 11-1 in five innings.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS:

SOUTH CALDWELL	10-2; 16-2
ALEXANDER CENTRAL	7-5; 10-9
WATAUGA	7-5; 11-6
HICKORY	6-6; 12-8
FRED T. FOARD	5-7; 7-10
ST. STEPHENS	4-8; 5-12
HIBRITEN	3-9; 6-14

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THURSDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

WATAUGA 8, ST. STEPHENS 4
SOUTH CALDWELL 11, HICKORY 3
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 14, HIBRITEN 5

SATURDAY'S GAMES:

SOUTH CALDWELL @ NORTH DAVIDSON SHOWCASE

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