

Hoyle Throws No-Hitter, Pioneers Survive

Written by Mike Kelly
Thursday, 05 May 2011 08:02

The title says it all.

The Watauga High baseball team just played well enough to win Wednesday night as the Pioneers survived a huge scare and defeated St. Stephens 1-0 in the opening round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference tournament.

Losing pitcher Jacob Hoyle, the Indians closer making his first start of the year, fired his first-career no-hitter in the losing cause. A bases-loaded walk to Josh Roberts in the bottom of the sixth inning scored Ryan Turner with the game's only run. The last pitcher to throw a no-hitter against WHS was Matt Payne of Alexander Central (who also played at North Carolina State and in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization) in 2003.

The win moves WHS (14-7) into a must-win semifinal match-up with Alexander Central Friday afternoon at MS Deal Stadium in Granite Falls. The winner will get the No.2 seed in the NW3A/4A Conference and an automatic berth in the state playoffs. The loser will most likely get a wildcard bid. And despite the loss, the Indians (6-14) will make the state playoffs in the Class 3A division, thanks to Hibriten's loss at Alexander Central.

Hoyle, who struck out nine, walked five men, two of those intentionally. And those intentional walks victimized the left-hander in the sixth inning. A two-out walk to Turner kept the inning alive. He advanced to second base on a wild pitch. Hoyle issued an intentional walk to Max Linville, putting runners on at first and second. A double steal moved them up to second and third. That prompted an intentional walk to Matt Proffitt loading the bases. It also set the stage for Roberts, who hurt the Indians in their last meeting (on April 21) with a grand slam and five RBI. Only this time, he didn't even swing the bat.

"It was the right move on Chip's (Watts, the St. Stephens coach) in that situation," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "We had a couple of very good hitters coming up in Linville and Proffitt. He felt the percentages were on his side pitching to Roberts. And when you make that decision, your pitcher has to throw strikes in that situation."

Winning pitcher Jake Watts matched Hoyle pitch-for-pitch. He threw his team-leading fifth complete game of the year, and his team-leading third shutout of the season as he went the distance. The right-hander scattered four hits and struck out a career high 13 men. He struck out the side in the seventh, and he fanned the eight of the last ten men he faced.

"I was pretty nervous when the game started," he said. "But when we turned that double play (in the fourth inning) I started settling down. We knew this was a big game for us. The playoffs are hanging in the balance, and we had to win this game to give ourselves a chance of getting there."

The Indians had their chances against Watts. They left four men on, but they also lost a runner trying to steal and they hit into a double play. Their best scoring chance came in the second inning.

Zack Bumgarner led off the inning with a single, and with one out, Sawyer Smith reached on an error, putting runners on at first and second. But Watts struck out the next two hitters to end the threat. And from the point on, Watts was in complete control.

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It was a far cry from his last outing against the Indians, when he left the game in the fifth inning and walked five men.

"It was a great effort for Watts," said St. Stephens coach Chip Watts. "He just gets better as the game goes on. He was really reaching back in the seventh inning and shut us down. We never had a chance. He blew it right by us."

Watts has now thrown 14 consecutive scoreless innings, dating back to his 9-0 win against R.S. Central last week. He's only given up six hits and has 23 strikeouts during that stretch.

"Jake pitched like I thought he would," Hardee said. "He's a senior, and he know what it means to be in a big game like this. Runs are hard to come by at this time of the year, and we were up against a tough pitcher in Hoyle. He kept us off balance all night, but we found a way to push a run across. And Jake took care of the rest. He pulled us through with a great effort."

Our coverage of the Alexander Central game on Friday afternoon begins at 4 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The Pioneers have beaten St. Stephens four consecutive times dating back to last year.....In their five meetings, the teams have been seperated by the mere total of eight runs. The largest margin of victory came on Senior Night when the Pioneers beat St. Stephens 8-4 at Pioneer Field.....Watts is 2-0 lifetime against the Indians.....Left-hander Tyler Jones will get the starting nod against Alexander Central Friday afternoon. It will be his second career start. In his last outing against Team Carolina at the East Rutherford Easter Tournament, Jones went 3 2/3 innings, and coughed up five runs. But only one was earned.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT:

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WEDNESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

WATAUGA 1, ST. STEPHENS 0

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 9, HIBRITEN 7

FRED T. FOARD 5, HICKORY 3

FRIDAY'S SEMI-FINAL GAMES:

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@ MS DEAL STADIUM IN GRANITE FALLS:

WATAUGA v. ALEXANDER CENTRAL 4:30 PM

FRED T. FOARD v. SOUTH CALDWELL 7 PM

SATURDAY'S GAMES;

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CHAMPIONSHIP GAME 7 PM