

## Pioneers To Face Pirates Friday

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The Watauga High baseball team, playing in the Western Quarterfinals for the first time in three years, will travel to Indian Trail for a match-up with Porter Ridge.

It's the first meeting ever between the schools. The Pirates (15-9), the No.1 seed from the Southern Carolina 3A/4A Conference, advanced by knocking off East Gaston 6-1 in a second-round game at home Wednesday night. Friday's game begins at 5 pm, and Dustin Kerley will make his varsity head coaching debut in that game for the Pioneers. Kerley, a varsity assistant and head JV coach, will take over the coaching reins for head coach Pete Hardee, who will be attending his daughter's (Katherine) wedding this weekend. It will be the first time in his 16 years as coach of the Pioneers (18-7) that Hardee will miss a game. He faced a similar scenario in 2009 when his daughter graduated from North Carolina State. The Pioneers were scheduled to play South Caldwell in the Northwestern 4A Conference championship game. Then assistant coach Andy Fox (now the head coach at Wilkes Community College) was going to step in and coach the team, but the contest was rained out. Kerley, who played at Alexander Central and at Mars Hill College, is in his second year with the WHS program. He was also an assistant coach under Bryan Craig at A.C. Reynolds. For a young assistant coach, Kerley has worked and played for three excellent coaches in Hardee, Craig and Gary Comer (at Alexander Central). "I've been blessed to have worked and played for some great baseball people," Kerley said in an earlier interview. "I've learned a lot from those them." The Pioneers come into Friday's game riding a season-best, seven-game winning streak. Our coverage Friday afternoon begins at 4:30 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.