

Watauga A Team Finishes Strong

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga Junior American Legion A Team closed out the regular season with a double-header sweep Wednesday night against the South Caldwell B Team in Sawmills.

The Watauga A Team (7-7 Northwestern Junior American Legion Division; 7-9 overall) won game one 6-2 behind a strong pitching effort by Taylor Shuford, and they captured the night-cap 4-0 as winning pitcher Chance Richards duplicated Shuford's effort with a solid pitching performance of his own.

"Our pitching was real good tonight," said A Team coach Bradley Rudisill. "The (Area 4) playoffs begin (Thursday) night, and winning our last two regular season games was big for our confidence."

Shuford went five innings, gave up two earned runs and struck out four. Austin Wilcox had a triple and a single in game one; Mason Illitch had a single and drove in two runs; Richards and Jesse Illitch each had a base hit and an RBI; Nick Williams walked twice and scored twice. In game two, Richards went 4 1/3 innings before he ran out of gas. He struck out four before he departed with the bases loaded and one out in the bottom of the fifth. Mason Illitch came on and killed off the threat to pick up the save.

Offensively, Mason Illitch was 3-3 with a run scored and an RBI; Shuford was 2-3 with a double and two RBI; Brian Bolster doubled and scored a run; Williams singled and scored a run.

Watauga travels to Asheville Thursday night for its Area 4 playoff opener against A.C. Reynolds at 6 pm. It's game one of a best-of-three series. Game two will be played in Boone Friday night; game three, if necessary, will be played in Asheville Saturday night. The winner of this series will play the winner of Hibriten and the Carolina Flames (from Maiden) in the second round.

"It's a new start tomorrow night," Rudisill said. "I don't know who we'll throw in that first game, but our guys will pick up a lot of valuable experience. We'll give it our best shot."

Thursday's game will be a single, seven-inning game. But if the teams decide to play a double-header, then they will play a pair of five-inning games.

WATAUGA B TEAM SPLITS SEASON FINALE

The Watauga Junior American Legion B Team finished the season by splitting its double-header

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with Hibriten Wednesday night at Pioneer Field.

Hibriten, which will join the Watauga A Team and the South Caldwell A Team in the Area 4 playoffs, defeated Watauga 8-2 in game one, but Watauga (3-9 Northwestern Junior American Legion Division; 3-11 overall) won game two, 7-5.

"It was a good way to end the season," said B Team coach Dustin Kerley. "The kids really played well in the second game, and it gave us a split."

Anthony Raymond went 2-2 with a double and he drove in both Watauga runs in game one. Colby Illitch went 1-2 in the opener.

But Watauga jumped on Hibriten for five runs in the first inning in game two. Matt Lambert, Justin Greene, Carson Isaacs, and Ian Watts all had run-scoring singles in the frame. But Matt Tyndall had the biggest blow of the game.

With the score 5-4, Tyndall delivered a two-out, two-run double that gave Watauga a three-run lead.

"It was a clutch hit for sure," Kerley said. "Tyndall really came through in the clutch. Our kids got a lot of experience this summer. This will pay off for our program when we begin our off-season work outs."

Andy Gilliam, making only his third appearance on the mound, got the win in game two. He went the distance and gave up five runs, three earned, on seven hits with a pair of walks and three strikeouts.

"He had only pitched one inning at the most all season," Kerley said. "But he gave us a gutsy effort out there. He battled, and he never let the game get away. It was a just a great effort."

Lambert, Hunter Isaacs, Adam Greene, Carson Isaacs and Gilliam will all join the Watauga A Team in the Area 4 playoffs, which begin Thursday night in Asheville against A.C. Reynolds at 6 pm.