

UPDATED: Watauga National Reaches District Finals

Written by Mike Kelly
Tuesday, 12 July 2011 20:45

The Watauga National 11-12-year-old little league team advanced to the District 7 finals Tuesday night, and it was done in dramatic fashion.

Trailing 8-7, Watauga National rallied for two runs in the bottom of the sixth and defeated Morganton 9-8 at Catawba Meadows in Burke County. Morganton, which went to the Little League World Series seven years ago, had erupted for 43 runs in its first two tournament games. But Watauga slammed the door on that high-powered offense Tuesday night.

Case Taylor, who went three innings in relief, got the win and shut Morganton down.

"Case did a great job keeping us in the game," said Watauga coach Tom Zuber. "And I am so proud of these kids. They never gave up, despite a bad second inning. It's a great win for us."

Watauga made four errors in the top of the second inning, handing Morganton a 5-0 lead. But Watauga battled back with six runs of its own in the bottom of the inning for a 6-5 lead.

Morganton went back in front 8-6, setting the stage for Watauga's dramatic comeback in the bottom of the sixth.

Trailing 8-7, Evan Suggs and Andy Zuber both reached to start the inning, Suggs, thanks to a throwing error on Zuber's hit, scored the tying run. Following a pair of intentional walks that loaded the bases, Hamilton Castle drove in Zuber with the game-winning run with an RBI single.

"To beat a team like Morganton, especially with their great tradition, is unbelievable," Zuber said. "They're a very talented team, but our kids just kept after them. They gave everything they had. Everyone made a big contribution. Reaching the district finals is a great thrill for these kids."

Zuber and Graham Gilliam each had two hits apiece for Watauga National. The win moves Watauga National into the championship game Monday at a site to be determined.

Unfortunately, Watauga American was eliminated in the 11-12-year-old tournament Tuesday night. Wilkes American defeated Watauga American 1-0 at Memorial Park in Wilkesboro in a loser's bracket game. With the win, Wilkes American will now play Wilkes National in an elimination game Thursday night at Memorial Park.

The Junior tournament begins Wednesday night at the Optimist Park. Wilkes takes on Morganton; the winner plays Watauga Thursday at 5:30 in Boone. The Watauga Juniors are coached by Bill Dicus.

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