

Turner Signs With Navy

Written by Mike Kelly

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Watauga High senior Ryan Turner always had a dream of playing Division I college baseball, and his dream came through Wednesday afternoon, when he signed his National Letter of Intent with the Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD.

Turner, an All-Northwestern 3A/4A Conference selection for the Pioneers,

joins a Navy program that reached the NCAA regionals last spring. And Turner, who was, without question, WHS's most improved player last year, earned his dream through determination and a tireless work ethic.

"I met with Ryan and his parents two years ago concerning his possibilities of playing college baseball," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "And I must admit, my expectations and his were miles apart. But he proved me wrong. Ryan has made himself a very good baseball player. His hitting especially, has really improved."

Turner batted .351 and he led the team in slugging (.588) and on-base percentage (.474). He was also perfect in steal attempts with a team-high 13 stolen bases.

"That's really a compliment coming from coach Hardee," Turner said. "But he always pushes us hard to bring the best out of us. I really wanted this, the chance to play Division I baseball. And it became a reality."

The Naval Academy became interested after watching him play at the North Carolina State Games last June. And the interest grew from there.

"They really offered me back in July," Turner said. "But they really made it clear that they wanted me in August. They were really sold on me after they watched me play with the Dirt Bags, my showcase team (based in Raleigh). They feel I can play the left side of the infield for them. And I'm working hard right now to battle for a starting position as a freshman."

"They really believe Ryan can play shortstop for them," Hardee said. "Really, Ryan is comfortable wherever you put him in the infield. He can play second, third, and even shortstop. He played short this summer and handled the position very well. He should fit in nicely at Navy." Turner has not received a Congressional Appointment, but it is based on a point system. He submitted his application, and he received his letter of assurance. He will also meet with Senator Kay Hagan next week concerning the appointment.

"It's an honor," he said. "It's not like playing at a civilian college. It's serving my country. I have a five-year window once I'm done with school to serve in the Navy. I will be an Ensign Lieutenant when I graduate. I haven't really given much thought to it, but making a career in the service could be a possibility. If it's not, graduating from the Academy looks great on the resume."

And Turner, who is an excellent student, is rubbing elbows with some famous people that graduated from the Naval Academy. That list includes the likes of Heisman Trophy winner and former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach, NBA great David Robinson, former NFL running back Napoleon McCallum, Admiral William "Bull" Halsey, and former President Jimmy Carter, just to name a few.

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"It's a legacy," Turner said. "On my visit (during Labor Day weekend) , they showed us around, they showed us the Heisman Trophies, all the weight rooms had signs up "Beat Army." It's a great rivalry between those two, and Navy has a legendary athletic program. I'm looking forward to it. It's great. I couldn't be happier where I landed."

Academically, Turner is still undecided, but aeronautics is a possibility.

"I would like to be a pilot," he said. "I would like to get an aeronautics engineering degree. But nothing is etched in stone right now. But to graduate from here, you establish yourself. It's a resume builder. It's discipline, It's hard work. It's a great place for me and a great opportunity." And a great honor for Watauga County.