

Pioneers Stave Off Pesky Tigers

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga High baseball team kept its record perfect by knocking off Fred T. Foard 11-5 Tuesday night in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference opener for both teams in Newton. And the Pioneers got the job done with some

clutch two-out hitting. WHS (3-0 overall; 1-0 NW3A/4A) had five two-out hits that handed the Pioneers seven runs. The biggest blows came from Brian Bolster, who delivered a pinch-hit single with two outs in the third that wiped out a 3-2 deficit and tied the game at three; and Taylor Shuford, who belted a two-out, two-run single with the bases loaded that gave the Pioneers a 6-4 lead, and put them on top to stay.

"Those were big hits by both those guys," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "Bolster is a great kid, and he'll do what it takes to win. That hit was a momentum changer for us. And Shuford, I was hoping the guy would groove him a fastball because he can tear one up. And he drove it into left field."

Shuford now has five RBI this season. It ties him with David Martin for the team lead in that category. And Martin, who came in batting a lofty .572, made a huge contribution of his own in the sixth, when he belted a three-run shot down the right-field line that sailed over the foul pole and landed in Fred T. Foard's (2-2; 0-1) neighboring softball field.

"It was a mammoth shot," Hardee said. "David is back to being his old self. He's swinging the bat like he use to. Taking time off last fall to play football was the best medicine for him. He isn't pressing at the plate anymore. He's relaxed, and he's stroking the ball."

Despite the win, the game was a coach's nightmare. The teams combined for seven errors (three of those belonged to WHS). And the Pioneers left four men in scoring position and lost three base runners.

But despite those pratfalls, winning pitcher Ethan Greene (2-0) carried WHS into the sixth inning. He gave up five runs, but only one was earned. He struck out six and walked three. Tyler Jones came on in relief and shut the door.

"Ethan got us deep in the game, and that's all you can ask of him." Hardee said. "Trust me, as a pitcher, there are days where you don't feel your best. And that's 80% of the time. He battled, and I thought he found it (his control) near the end of the game before he got tired."

The Pioneers also won their fifth consecutive game against the Tigers since they became conference foes in 2009-10.

"And it was typical Watauga-Fred T. Foard game," Hardee said. "They always play us tough, especially here. We knew it was going to be a battle. It's huge to start the season with a win on the road, especially here.

"We've got to take care of these games. And it's nice that we won't see South (Caldwell) until later in the season, so we can build up to that game, and put ourselves in a position where those games mean a whole lot."

The Pioneers travel to Lexington Thursday night for a non-conference game against North Davidson. Ryan Turner will get the starting nod. Our coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The JV team defeated Fred T. Foard 1-0 Tuesday night. Winning pitcher Hunter Isaacs went six innings, scattered four hits, struck out four and walked one. Jesse Illich had two

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hits and drove in the game's only run with an RBI single in the fifth.