

Pioneers Come Through Big For Brady

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga High baseball team put its heart and dignity on display Friday night. Yes, they beat one of their heated rivals in Alexander Central 8-0 at WHS-High Field behind a masterful performance by senior Matt Proffitt. But Friday's effort goes beyond the win column. Instead it was a

huge win for Brady Bakken and his family.

Bakken, an 11-year-old boy who was attending Vallie Crusis Elementary School before he became ill, has been diagnosed with Burkitt's Lymphoma, a malignant cancer that is curable. Bakken is currently undergoing treatment at Brenner Children's Hospital in Winston-Salem, N.C. And the Pioneers to show their support against this disease wore lime green tops Friday night against the Cougars. The baseball program also sold T-shirts and lime green bracelets at the game. All of those proceeds, and a portion of the proceeds from the game, were donated to the Bakken family to help with their medical expenses.

"It's all them," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "Our players, especially the seniors, went out and did this on their own. It shows the heart and character of this team. I am so proud to be coaching this team."

And the Pioneers didn't disappoint Brady on his big night. Proffitt threw a gem. He scattered five hits and struck out seven in his first start of the year. He also homered and drove in three runs. But he admits, doing it on such a special night was more than gratifying.

"That's just the way we are," he said. "This team is real close. We love each other, and if someone's down, we're there to pick them up. A lot of us have been together a long time. We're almost like family."

And the Bakken family felt that warmth Friday night.

"Brady couldn't be here, but he kept calling to see how the team was doing," said his father Brett. "This is a wonderful community, and I'm so glad our family is a part of it. This was great. It was real special."

And Brady's older brother, Chandler got in on the act as well. Making his first start of the year as a designated hitter, he drove in a run with a ground-ball out in WHS's eight-run fourth inning that gave the Pioneers a 2-0 lead at the time.

"I was just trying to put the ball in play," Bakken said. "The important thing is we won the game, and we did it on a special night for my brother. And I like the lime green tops. Some of the guys even got lime green high-top socks. And they looked real good. I was impressed."

Patti Turner and Barbara Linville were responsible for getting the lime green tops, which is the color use to identify Burkitt's Lymphoma. The players took care of the rest.

"As a coach, yes you want win games and conference championships and things like that," Hardee said. "It's only natural because you're a competitor. But it's also real special when you see your players giving back to the community like they did tonight. Afterall, baseball is just a game. What Chandler's brother is dealing with is a heck of lot serious. I'm just glad our team could help someone out in their time of need."

And so is the Bakken family.