

## UPDATED: Proffitt Powers Pioneers Past Spartans

Written by Mike Kelly  
Tuesday, 10 April 2012 20:56

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Matt Proffitt did his best impersonation of "Super Man" on Tuesday afternoon. The Watauga High senior cut down a runner at the plate, he blasted a two-run homer that highlighted a five-run third inning, and he struck out Alex Emerick with the bases loaded in the top of the seventh as the Pioneers bounced back from

Monday's disappointing loss to beat Team Carolina 6-4 at McNair Field in a second-round consolation game of the East Rutherford Easter Tournament.

"And I put some pressure on him, too, by walking their best hitter (Foley George)," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "He was killing us all day with his hitting, so I put him on to load the bases. But Matt threw strikes and finished things off to win the game."

George went 3-3 with a home run and two RBI to pace Team Carolina (5-8), which will play R.S. Central in the seventh-place game Wednesday at 12 noon. Proffitt, who picked up his second save, worked a full count before he got Emerick looking at strike three to end the game. The win moves WHS (9-7) into the fifth-place game against Chase Wednesday afternoon at 2:30 p.m. The Trojans (8-6-1) advanced by knocking off R.S. Central 6-4 on Tuesday.

"Matt is having a big season for us," Hardee said. "And he had a great day for us today. He's got a lot of power. That home run he hit was way out of here. And he was mentally tough today. He got the job done with the game on the line. He really came through for us."

But Proffitt wasn't alone. The Pioneers also got some timely contributions from Taylor Shuford, who hit his first home run of the year in the second inning that tied the game at 1-1; Brian Miller, who had a pinch-hit, run-scoring single that gave WHS a 6-2 lead in the third; Ethan Critcher, who had two hits, a stolen base and a run scored; Tyler Jones, who had two hits, including a triple and two stolen bases; and Tripp Taylor (2-2), who turned in one of his best efforts of the year. The left hander, who struggled in his last outing against North Davidson on April 4, went four innings, gave up an earned run on two hits, he walked two and struck out four.

Taylor retired the first eight men he faced as he picked up his second win of the year.

"Tripp did a great job for us," Hardee said. "He threw strikes and carried us into the late innings. I was pleased with the way he threw strikes, and he got a lot of ground ball outs. He really produced today. He really took a step forward. He had been struggling in his last two outings, but today he looked like he did early in the season."

Chance Richards, who made his first varsity start, carried WHS into the third inning before he left the game. The right hander gave up two earned runs on five hits and struck out four.

"Chance did pretty well for his first start," Hardee said. "But he's not conditioned to go five or six innings just yet, so we kept a eye on him. We felt three, maybe four innings tops was his limit tonight. He was a little nervous for his first start of year. But he did a good job and carried us into the middle innings."

The WHS pitching staff as a whole turned in another strong effort. The Pioneers racked up nine strike outs and only walked three. And one of those was intentional. Offensively, the Pioneers made eight hits. They also had six stolen bases. But despite their five-run explosion in the third, the Pioneers left nine men on base, seven in scoring position.

A pair of walks and two costly errors by the Spartans aided WHS's big inning. But WHS blew an excellent scoring chance in the first inning when Jones led off the game with a triple to

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left-center field, but was left stranded at third; and in the sixth inning, when WHS left the bases loaded.

"And we're still not swinging the bat that well," Hardee said. "We're leaving too many men on base. We've got to be mentally tough, especially with men in scoring position, and drive them in. When your lead-off hitter gets a triple, there's no excuse for not bringing him in. We had some chances to break this game open, but we left it hanging in the balance."

And Team Carolina staged a rally in the late innings. George's solo home run in the sixth made it 6-3; and Dillon Pressley's RBI single in the seventh made it 6-4.

"And they've got some good hitters on that team," Hardee said. "Give them credit. They didn't give in after we had that big inning. They kept us close and they had a shot at the end. A flare with the bases loaded in that seventh inning could have tied the game, or worse."

Losing pitcher Dakota Turner of the Spartans went the distance, gave up three earned runs, walked five and struck out seven. During one stretch, he retired eight of the nine batters he faced. And when WHS loaded the bases in the sixth, Turner got Critcher on an infield pop up and he struck out Shuford.

"There's still things we have to work on," Hardee said. "And it's frustrating to be playing for fifth place again. When you get into a tournament like this, the goal is to reach the championship round. But let's face it, all this is a process of getting ready for the state playoffs. Coach Bobby Reynolds of East Rutherford spoke to our team before today's game. And he asked our team if our last effort was good enough to win a third-round state playoff game. And that's the attitude we have to take every time we take the field."

Our coverage of Wednesday's game begins at 2 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

**NOTES:** Max Linnville did not play Tuesday because he was nursing a hamstring injury. Ryan Turner got the start at shortstop. Jacob Gaineyu got the start at second base.....Chase is a Class 2A school and a member of the South Mountain Athletic 1A/2A Conference.....And the Trojans defeated WHS in the opening round of the East Rutherford Tournament last year.

## **EAST RUTHERORDEASTER TOURNAMENT (at McNair Field, Forest City)**

### **Monday's results**

Game 1: Alexander Central 4, Chase 3

**Game 2: W. Iredell 2, Watauga 1**

Game 3: S. Caldwell 10, R-S Central 0, 5 inn.

Game 4: E. Rutherford 4, Carolina Spartans 0

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### **Tuesday's results**

Game 5: Chase 6, R-S Central 4

**Game 6: Watauga 6, Carolina Spartans 4**

Game 7: S. Caldwell 5, Alexander Central 4

Game 8: E. Rutherford 3, W. Iredell 1

### **Wednesday's games**

Seventh place: R-S Central vs. Carolina Spartans, noon.

**Fifth place: Chase vs. Watauga, 2:30 p.m.**

Third place: Alexander Central vs. W. Iredell, 5 p.m.

Championship: S. Caldwell vs. E. Rutherford, 7:30 p.m.

## **22ND ANNUAL CATAWBA COUNTY EASTER BASEBALL CLASSIC (at Catawba County Fairgrounds, Newton)**

### **Monday's results**

Game 1: No. 2 Hickory 6, No. 7 Fred T. Foard 5, 8 inn.

Game 2: No. 6 W. Caldwell 12, No. 3 Bunker Hill 5

Game 3: No. 1 S. Iredell 12, No. 8 Newton-Conover 6

Game 4: No. 5 Maiden 6, No. 4 St. Stephens 4

### **Tuesday's results**

Game 5: No. 8 Newton-Conover 15, No. 7 Fred T. Foard 9

Game 6: No. 3 Bunker Hill 12, No. 4 St. Stephens 1, 6 inn.

Game 7: No. 2 Hickory 10, No. 6 W. Caldwell 0, 5 inn.

Game 8: No. 5 Maiden 5, No. 1 S. Iredell 4, 8 inn.

### **Wednesday's games**

Third-place: No. 6 W. Caldwell (6-9) vs. No. 1 S. Iredell (9-5), 4:30 p.m.

Championship: No. 2 Hickory (11-5) vs. No. 5 Maiden (10-6), 7:30 p.m.