

Pioneers Tough One Out Against Chase

Written by Mike Kelly

Thursday, 12 April 2012 08:57

A team is defined as a group of individuals working together for one cause. Well, the Watauga High baseball team put forth a great team effort on Wednesday afternoon as the Pioneers knocked off Chase 5-2 in the fifth-place game of the East Rutherford Easter Tournament. The Pioneers,

who lost to West Iredell in the opening round Monday, closed out the tournament with two straight wins.

The win also erased a first-round loss to Chase (8-6-1) last season.

"And this gives us some momentum going back into (Northwestern 3A/4A) conference play next week," said WHS senior Ryan Turner, who played shortstop the last two days with Max Linnville nursing a hamstring injury. "Tournaments like this are good. It gives you a sense of motivation and gets you going. We've got Alexander Central and South Caldwell next week when get back to conference play. It's going to be a big week."

The Pioneers (10-7 overall; 6-2 NW3A/4A), who will start Ethan Greene on Tuesday night against the Cougars, are currently in second place in the NW3A/4A, and they've won four straight in league play.

But a big concern right now is leaving men on base. The Pioneers left 11 men on Wednesday afternoon against Chase; they left 27 men on base in thee tournament games.

"We've got to get mentally stronger at the plate with runners in scoring position," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "We made things real tough on ourselves today leaving men in scoring position. Fortunately, we broke through late in the game. I played a lot of people today, and those guys delivered."

Hardee used 18 players on Wednesday. Brian Miller, who had an pinch-hit, run-scoring single in Tuesday's win against Team Carolina, had the biggest at bat of the game. With the scored tied 2-2 in the top of the seventh, Miller produced a sacrifice fly that scored Ethan Critcher with the eventual winning run.

"Coach gave me the bunt sign at first," Miller said. "But the passed ball moved the runners to second and third, and coach told me to swing away. I'm just glad I could produce a run in that situation."

"It was a great at bat for Brian," Hardee said. "You want quality at bats in those situations. All Brian had to do was put the ball in play, and he did what he was suppose to do. He got the job done with that fly ball to the outfield."

Taylor Shuford followed with an pinch-hit, RBI, double that made it 4-2; and Jacob Gainey laid down a perfect safety-squeeze bunt down the first base line that drove in pinch-runner Tripp Taylor with the final run in the frame.

"Jacob is a great bunter," Hardee said. "He executed the squeeze real well in that situation. He did a super job pushing that run across."

Matt Proffitt, who was named to the All-Tournament Team, picked up his third win of the year. The right hander (3-1 with two saves) went six innings, struck out six and scattered five hits. Greene, despite loading the bases on an error, a walk and a scratch hit, struck out Shane Pearson and Blake Francis to end the game for his first save.

"This is a great team win for us," Hardee said. "This is our second week in a row playing three

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games in three days. These guys deserve some time off. I'm going to give them a chance to rest up the next few days. We'll go back at it next Monday. We have a big week coming up with Alexander Central next Tuesday.

"But I'm proud of today's effort. It's not easy to play in a fifth-place consolation game. It isn't your goal coming into a tournament like this. But we worked our tails off and finished this tournament in a positive way."

South Caldwell won the tournament championship by blanking the host team, East Rutherford, 11-0 in the title game. Alexander Central won the third-place game by knocking off West Iredell, 14-7.

The Pioneers travel to Alexander Central next Tuesday night, April 17, and our coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: □ : Proffitt was the old member of the Pioneers to be named to the All-Tournament Team. The WHS senior had three hits, including a two-run homer, he threw a man out at the plate, he also picked up a win and a save in WHS's three tournament games.

EAST RUTHERFORD EASTER TOURNAMENT (at McNair Field, Forest City, N.C.)

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

SEVENTH PLACE: TEAM CAROLINA 6, R.S. CENTRAL 3

FIFTH PLACE: WATAUGA 5, CHASE 2

THIRD PLACE: ALEXANDER CENTRAL 14, WEST IREDELL 7

FIRST PLACE: SOUTH CALDWELL 11, EAST RUTHERFORD 0

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CATAWBA EASTER CLASSIC (at Fairgrounds, Hickory, N.C.)

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

FIRST PLACE: HICKORY 12, MAIDEN 1 (5 INNINGS)