

## Martin, Proffitt Power Pioneers Past Panthers

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 25 April 2012 09:17

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The Pioneers are beginning to gell at the right time. Solid pitching, a stingy defense, and a power boost on offense have backboned the Pioneers on their recent run. The Watauga High baseball team (13-7 overall; 9-2 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) won its fifth game in a row

(and seventh straight in league play) by clobbering Hibriten 7-1 Tuesday night at Hagaman Field/Wilson Park in Lenior. Unfortunately, South Caldwell ended WHS' title hopes by nailing down the regular-season championship with a 5-0 win against Alexander Central.

But despite finishing second, what matters most to WHS coach Pete Hardee is consistency. And Hardee likes what he sees.

"Hey, we didn't win the conference, but that's all right," he said. "The games that matter the most, the conference tournament and the state playoffs, are coming up. And I feel we're starting to peak at the right time."

Ethan Greene turned in another stellar performance, fueling his chances for Pitcher of the Year honors. The right hander went the distance and gave up an earned run on three hits with six strikeouts. Cody Saunders broke up Greene's shutout bid with a solo home run in the seventh. Saunders, who had two of Hibriten's (8-11; 5-6) three hits Tuesday night, is 4-5 against WHS pitching this season.

"I played with his dad at (Appalachian State)," Hardee said. "His father was a good player. And his son is a solid hitter. But Greene is pitching well. You could tell he was upset when he gave up that run. He wanted the shut out. He's a perfectionist."

"The home run was my fault," said WHS senior David Martin. "I called for the pitch (a fastball) down and in, and (Saunders) crushed it."

But despite that miscue, Martin had the biggest blow of the game, a grand slam that broke the game open in the fifth inning. It was the first grand slam of the season for the Pioneers, the first grand slam of Martin's career, and the first grand slam hit by a WHS player since Josh Roberts, who did it last year against St. Stephens.

"The last thing I wanted was David Martin up there with the bases loaded," said Hibriten coach Terry Henthorne. "We threw him a change up and it was below his knees. And I'll be darned, if he didn't go down and get the head of the bat on it to drive it out. He's a great hitter."

Matt Proffitt gave WHS the only run it needed with a solo home run to lead off the fourth inning for a 1-0 lead. The Pioneers made 12 hits. WHS has made 31 hits in its last three games, and the Pioneers have also belted four home runs during that stretch.

"Watauga is really putting it all together," Henthorne said. "At least they did tonight. Greene was having fun on the mound, and he was putting his pitches where we wanted. And offensively, they've got a lot of power. For a team like us, we've got to keep things close. But with Greene on the mound with the way he's pitching, and with WHS hitting the ball like it is, that's tough to do."

The Pioneers also won their sixth consecutive game against the Panthers. The Pioneers are scheduled to play A.C. Reynolds in a non-conference game tonight. Our coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

**NOTES:** Max Linnville missed his second consecutive game with a hamstring injury. According to WHS coach Pete Hardee, Linnville may not rejoin the team until the NW3A/4A Conference

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Tournament semifinals on May 4. Jacob Gainey made his second consecutive start, and had two hits in three trips. Gainey is 5-9 this season (for a .556 batting average).....The JV team defeated Hibriten, 4-2.....South Caldwell won its second conference championship in a row. The Spartans won consecutive conference titles in 2007 and 2008 before the Pioneers stepped in to win league titles in 2009 and 2010. The last team to win a conference title other than WHS or South Caldwell was A.C. Reynolds in 2006 in the old Northwestern 4A Conference.....The Pioneers have made just two errors in their last seven games.

### **TUESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES**

**WATAUGA 7, HIBRITEN 1**

SOUTH CALDWELL 5, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 0

HICKORY 6, ST. STEPHENS 0

### **WEDNESDAY'S GAMES**

**A.C. REYNOLDS @ WATAUGA**

SHELBY @ FRED T. FOARD

**NEWTON-CONOVER @ ST. STEPHENS**

**NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS**

xSOUTH CALDWELL 11-1; 16-2  
**WATAUGA** 9-2; 13-7  
HICKORY 6-5; 15-6  
HIBRITEN 5-6; 8-11  
ST. STEPHENS 5-6; 9-9  
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 2-9; 8-14  
FRED T. FOARD 1-10; 4-16

**x - CONFERENCE CHAMPION**