

Pioneers Rally Late Against Fred T. Foard

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 02 May 2012 08:19

The Watauga High baseball team survived a huge scare Tuesday night as the Pioneers knocked off Fred T. Foard 8-7 in eight innings in the opening round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament at Watauga-High Field. Matt Proffitt, the third pitcher utilized by WHS coach Pete Hardee,

picked up his sixth win of the year in relief. He also delivered the game-winning blow with a bases-loaded single against a drawn-in infield scoring Max Linnville from third base. The win moves WHS into the semifinal round where the Pioneers will play Hickory Friday afternoon at 4:30 p.m. at MSDeal Stadium in Granite Falls.

But lost in the shuffle was a tremendous effort by relief pitcher Tripp Taylor, who was the real hero in WHS's (15-7) comeback win. The left hander threw two scoreless innings of relief and stopped the bleeding when it looked like the Tigers (5-18) were going to pull away.

"I've just gone back to the fundamentals," Taylor said. "I was working on four pitches, but now I've cut that down to three (a slider, a curve ball and a fastball). I'm just trying to shove it as hard as I can. I can't throw as hard as (Ethan Greene) or Matt Proffitt, but I try to image I'm throwing it 99 miles-an-hour out there, even though I'm throwing it around 77 miles-an-hour."

Taylor came on with two outs in the fourth inning and his team trailing 7-3. Greene, who has been stellar in recent weeks, had an off night and was touched up for seven runs on eight hits with three walks in three-plus innings. The Tigers finally knocked him out of the game with a five-run uprising in the fourth. But Taylor settled things down by giving up just four hits and a walk during his two-inning stint.

"Greenie was a little bit tired tonight," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "His arm had a little fatigue in it. We've been riding him hard of late. And that's understandable. But I'm real proud of Tripp. He done this before. He's pitched well. He's come in and stopped the bleeding. He's gaining a lot of experience and he'll be ready to be one of our main guys next season."

Linnville and Tyler Jones backboned WHS offensively. Linnville, who missed the last two games with a hamstring injury, was 3-3 with a double, a sacrifice fly, two runs scored, a stolen base and a run-batted-in; Jones was 3-4 with a double, a triple, two stolen bases and an RBI. His run-scoring double tied the game at 7-7 in the fifth inning. Both teams also squandered some excellent scoring chances.

The Pioneers left ten men on base, including seven in scoring position; they also lost two base runners and hit into two double plays. The Tigers left nine men on, including five in scoring position, and they lost three base runners. But Linnville, who reached with a one-out single in the eighth, made the play of the night stealing second base on a pick-off play.

"Coach Hardee told me to go, so I was breaking right away," Linnville said. "I saw the pick-off sign, so I went in hard with my cleats and knocked the ball out of (shortstop Matt Ward's) glove. It was a made up play, but it worked."

Ryan Turner, who belted his first home run of the year in the second inning, singled sending Linnville to third; and the Tigers intentionally walked David Martin to load the bases, setting the stage for Proffitt's game-winning heroics.

"We never lost confidence in ourselves," Linnville said. "The attitude was we were going to come back. And coach Hardee told us going in that we're defending a championship, we're not

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going in just to win the tournament. We struggled early, but at least we won the game in the end."

"I was proud of our guys," Hardee said. "They played hard tonight and fought hard to get back in this game. Tournament games are tough. (Fred T. Foard) was fighting to extend their season. But our guys battled and won this game. We used a lot of pitching tonight. I really would like to start Proffitt Friday night, but we'll rest (Greenie and Proffitt) arms in practice and we'll see how things go the rest of this week."

Our coverage begins at 4 p.m. Friday afternoon on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The Pioneers have beaten Fred T. Foard seven consecutive times since they became conference foes in 2009-10.....The Pioneers pulled off a huge upset as a No.7 seed against South Caldwell in 2002. The Pioneers prevailed 6-2 in Sawmills that season, and despite a 10-17 record, made it to the conference championship game before they were eliminated by Alexander Central.....Tuesday night's outing was Greene's poorest effort since a 10-5 loss to South Caldwell at home on April 5 of last year.

TUESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

WATAUGA 8, FRED T. FOARD 7 (8 INNINGS)

HICKORY 2, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 1

ST. STEPHENS 12, HIBRITEN 3

SOUTH CALDWELL - BYE

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FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT SEMIFINAL ROUND

HICKORY v. WATAUGA, 4:30 P.M.
ST. STEPHENS v. SOUTH CALDWELL, 7 P.M.

SATURDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME, 7 P.M.