

Pioneers Blast East Gaston In Playoff Opener

Written by Mike Kelly
Saturday, 12 May 2012 09:59

The Watauga High baseball team was back to its old self Friday night. The Pioneers, who closed out the regular season on a six-game winning streak, rediscovered their magic touch in the opening round of the Class 4A state playoffs as they clobbered East Gaston 12-1 in six innings. The game was called after six innings by the ten-run mercy rule. The Pioneers

(16-8) pounded out 12 hits, and they took advantage of five Warriors (13-10) errors. And winning pitcher Ethan Greene (7-2) bounced back from a sub-par performance in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament (he had a 14.00 earned-run-average in two post-season appearances) to handcuff the Warriors. He scattered four hits and struck out nine in picking up his seventh win of the year.

"Maybe having the week off was a better than I thought," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "I was disappointed at what happened in the conference tournament, but we seemed well rested tonight and real focused. We just came out and took control of this game right away."

The Pioneers jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the second inning. Ethan Critcher doubled with two outs, and he scored on Corey Belden's infield single and a throwing error by shortstop Tyler Price. The Warriors tied it up in the bottom of the second inning on Matt Grimmitt's two-out, run-scoring single. But from that point on, the Pioneers were in total control.

Greene buckled down and retired nine men in a row during one stretch, and the Pioneers jumped on top for good with three runs in the third. Clint Trivette led off the inning with a double; Max Linnville singled and Ryan Turner doubled to score Trivette for a 2-1 lead. Linnville scored on a throwing error by first baseman Tyler Persinger and Turner stole home on a delayed double steal with David Martin, who walked, for a 4-1 lead.

"I felt real good tonight," Greene said. "I felt myself getting tired early (last week), but I took the week off and didn't throw much. I got my velocity back and I started to spot the ball better. And I've picked up another pitch. I started throwing the cut fastball. Now I've got two fastballs to work with. One goes in and the other goes away against a right-handed hitter. It kept them off balance, and I was using my change up, too. So, I had five pitches going tonight."

Greene was dominant from third inning on. Easton Payton snapped the streak as he reached on a throwing error by Turner in the fifth. Jarke Hopkins reached on an infield single moments later, putting runners on first and second with two outs, but Greene retired Persinger to end the inning. The win also avenged a first-round loss to the Warriors in the opening-round of the state playoffs in 2010.

The Pioneers will now play T.C. Roberson in a second-round game Tuesday night. The Rams (25-2), ranked No.1 state in Class 4A by Impactbaseball.com, advanced as they came from behind to beat Hopewell 6-5 Friday night. The Rams rallied for three runs in the bottom of the seventh to win the game. Phil Leyva's drove in the game-winning run with a two-out, run-scoring single. James Nevant got things started with a lead-off home run in the seventh inning.

"It was nice to beat these guys after they beat us here two years ago," Linnville said. "We set the tone early and won the game in six. Coach has stressed to us that it's just another game. As seniors, and we've got 12 of them on this team, we want to play as long as we can. So, we're just taking it inning by inning. It keeps the pressure off of us. And now, we have a chance to play the No.1 team in the state. I'm excited."

Pioneers Blast East Gaston In Playoff Opener

Written by Mike Kelly
Saturday, 12 May 2012 09:59

Linnville paced the attack with three hits in five trips. He scored three runs and drove in a run. Linnville is hitting .464 for the year, and he's batting .455 in three post-season games. Leading 5-1, WHS finally broke the game open with seven runs in the sixth inning. A starting time for Tuesday's second-round state playoff game has yet to be announced. But the game will be carried live on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A SCOREBOARD

FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

WATAUGA 12, EAST GASTON 1 (6 INNINGS)
SOUTH CALDWELL 12, McDOWELL 1 (5 INNINGS)
HICKORY 5, EAST HENDERSON 1
CREST 13, ST. STEPHENS 8
PATTON 3, HIBRITEN 2

TUESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

Pioneers Blast East Gaston In Playoff Opener

Written by Mike Kelly
Saturday, 12 May 2012 09:59

WATAUGA @ T.C. ROBERSON
ASHEVILLE @ HICKORY
A.C. REYNOLDS @ SOUTH CALDWELL