

Ryder and Utah Jones Are Officially Pioneers

Written by Mike Kelly
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The \$64,000 question has finally been answered. And from the looks of it, head coach Pete Hardee and the Watauga High baseball team are the big winners. The Pioneers, thanks to Appalachian State University hiring Billy Jones as its new baseball coach in early July, have picked up two solid baseball players in Ryder and Utah Jones. The coaches sons, especially

the older one, Ryder, come to Boone with high accolades. Ryder Jones is a 6-foot-3 rising senior with a live arm and a world of talent. He's been ranked among the top 50 players in the country by Perfectgame.org, and he was among 40 players invited to tryout for the USA 18-and-under Baseball Team in June. Jones hit 12 home runs his junior year led Stillwater (OK.) High to the state tournament for the first time since 2005.

"I've spoken to Ryder and Utah, and they're going to play baseball this season," Hardee said. "Ryder can throw it in the low 90's. He's really something, and Utah is a solid middle infielder. They definitely will help us out. It's going to be a lot fun coaching those guys. They're big additions to our team."

And the Pioneers, who were 16-9 and lost to T.C. Roberson in the second-round of the Class 4A state playoffs, are looking to replace a strong senior class that graduate in May. Among those graduated seniors were Ethan Greene (the co-Pitcher of the Year in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference), David Martin, Max Linnville and Matt Proffitt (the co-Player of the Year in the NW3A/4A and an All-State performer).

"We're going to be all right," Hardee said. "We've got some good players coming back, and some young players that can really help us. We could have a deep pitching staff. If Tyler (Jones, and no relation to Ryder and Utah) can come around (he battled a sore arm last year), Tripp Taylor, who picked up some valuable experience last year, Chance Richards, we have some good players coming back. It could be a fun season. I'm looking forward to it."

So are we.

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Photo Courtesy: Ryder Jones, PHOTO SUBMITTED