

Pioneers Advance To Finals

Written by Mike Kelly
Thursday, 24 April 2014 22:26

It's been an unpredictable season for the Watauga High baseball team. But for a team that was left searching for answers just a week ago, the Pioneers seem to have found the proper remedy at an opportune time.

The Pioneers (9-11), who snapped a three-game losing streak earlier in the day against Rocky Mount Prep, followed that up by knocking off last year's defending champ, Tarboro , 6-3 Thursday night in the second round of the Tarboro Easter Classic at Municipal Stadium.

The win moves WHS into Friday night's championship game against Southampton Academy (Va.) at 7 p.m. Coverage begins at 6:50 p.m. on AM 1450, WATA and GoBlueridge.net. The Indians are 18-1.

"Maybe we should find an Easter tournament during the first week of March," said WHS coach Pete Hardee. "The Easter tournament has been a starting point for us in past years. We always seem to find our second wind in these tournaments. Tonight, we beat a scrappy team on their home field. We hit the ball, we made some great defensive plays, and we got a great performance out of (Matt Lambert). That's Watauga baseball."

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Lambert (3-1) handcuffed the Vikings (8-8) from the start. He registered two strikeouts in the first inning, and he was working on a three-hit shutout through the first four innings. The Vikings finally broke through with a run in the fifth.

A pair of walks, a hit batsman, and a sacrifice fly plated Tarboro's first run.

"I always have one bad inning and tonight it was the fifth," Lambert said. "It's just a combination of getting tired and getting frustrated. But this is a big win for us. It's a much needed win for us. Now we're in the championship game. Let's finish this tournament off the right way."

"Lambo wanted to close it out," Hardee said. "He didn't want to come out. He's a gamer, no doubt. But I knew I had to make the change (with one out and the bases loaded in the seventh). But he gave us a great effort. It's a big win, and he's our ace."

Lambert gave up three runs, all earned, on four hits with seven strikeouts and five walks. He also hit a batter.

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But it was right fielder Matt Tyndall, who made the play of the night. He caught Sam Flythe's sinking fly ball in the seventh inning with the bases loaded that limited the Vikings to just one run.

"Every time we've started Matt in right field, we've won the game," Hardee said. "That's why he's out there. Defensively, the guy is solid. He made a terrific play tonight. He really saved us."

Colby Illich made a great play of his own as he threw out a runner at the plate in the fourth inning. The Vikings lost two base runners and they also hit into a double play. Hunter Isaacs got the final two outs in the seventh and picked up his first save of the season.

The Pioneers snapped a scoreless tie with four runs in the second inning. Stedman Sauls plated WHS' first run with an RBI single; Jesse Illich, who was 4-4 on the night, doubled home WHS' second run; Justin Greer, who was 2-4, singled home a run that made it 3-0, and Lambert closed things out with an a base hit and an RBI that made it 4-0.

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Lambert also helped his own cause going 2-3 with a walk and two RBI. The Pioneers got their lead-off man on five consecutive times and they pounded out 12 hits.

The Pioneers added two more runs in the fourth, putting the contest out of reach. Andy Critcher, who led off the inning with a walk, scored on a wild pitch; Lambert doubled home a run that gave WHS a 6-0 lead.

NOTES: Hunter Isaacs picked up the save Thursday night. Isaacs is 3-2 with a save. He will get the starting nod Friday night against Southampton.....The Pioneers, who had scored all of two runs in their previous two games, exploded for 24 runs on Thursday.....Jesse Illich, who was 4-4 Thursday night, is hitting .392.....He had six hits on the day.....Hunter Isaacs had his most productive game of the year since opening day. He was 2-3 with a run scored.....There is a 50% chance of rain in the forecast for Friday.

TARBORO EASTER CLASSIC

THURSDAY'S GAMES

WATAUGA 18, ROCKY MOUNT PREP 0 (2 ½ INNINGS)

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LAWRENCE ACADEMY 10, TARBORO JV 0 (5 INNINGS)

WATAUGA 6, TARBORO 3

FRIDAY'S GAMES

FIFTH PLACE: TARBORO JV vs. ROCKY MOUNT PREP, 1 P.M.

THIRD PLACE: TARBORO vs. LAWRENCE ACADEMY, 4:30 P.M.

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: WATAUGA v. SOUTHAMPTON, 7 P.M.

SHELBY TOURNAMENT

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

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LAWNDALE-BURNS 2, SOUTH CALDWELL 1