

## Pioneers win NW4A title

Written by Mike Kelly  
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The Watauga High baseball team captured its first outright Northwestern 4A Conference title since 2000 on Friday night, and they received a helping hand from one of their biggest rivals.

Alexander Central aided WHS's cause by beating South Caldwell 3-2 on Friday night down Sawmills. Logan Gilliher drove in the game-winning run with a single in the top of the eighth inning. The Spartans (9-3 NW4A) could have won the game in the bottom of the seventh. They had the bases loaded and only one out, but they couldn't score.

With last night's result, the Pioneers (15-6 overall; 10-2 NW4A) win the final NW4A title in conference history. And with realignment, the Pioneers, South Caldwell and Alexander Central will join the new Northwest 3A/4A conference this fall. It's also WHS's first outright conference championship since 2000, when the Pioneers went 10-0 in league play that year and lost to Richmond County in the Western semi-finals.

The Pioneers, the No.1 seed, will receive a first-round bye and will play the East Burke-Alexander Central winner on Thursday night in the conference semi-finals at Deal Stadium in Granite Falls, NC. East Burke blasted Freedom 14-1 in six innings on Friday night down in Morganton; A.C. Reynolds beat McDowell 2-1 in eight innings in Asheville. Sam Jackson's RBI single drove in the game-winner in the bottom of the eighth.

East Burke, Alexander Central and A.C. Reynolds finish up in a three-way tie for fourth place with identical 5-7 records. But the Cavaliers get the No.4 seed for beating WHS; Alexander Central gets the a five seed for beating South Caldwell and A.C. Reynolds will be the sixth seed. So here is the schedule for the play-in round on Tuesday night:

#7 Freedom @ #2 South Caldwell  
#6 A.C. Reynolds @ #3 McDowell  
#5 Alexander Central @ #4 East Burke

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Also, congratulations to former WHS assistant coach Danny Hignight, who led Providence to its third Southwestern 4A championship last Wednesday night. Providence beat Ardrey Kell 4-2 to clinch the regular-season championship. Providence is 19-4. And if they advance to the third round of the state playoffs (Western Quarter-Finals), the Pioneers would most likely play Providence at home on Friday night, May 22nd. Providence defeated WHS 6-5 on April 18th in Charlotte, when Appalachian State recruit Tyler Zupcic belted a walk-off home run off Will Littlejohn of the Pioneers in the bottom of the seventh inning.