

Indians advance in state tournament

By SAM DAVIS
Chronicle Sports Editor

Strong pitching by brothers Jim and Brian Peterson coupled with sound fundamental baseball carried the Winston-Salem Indians to two wins last week in the State Semi-Pro Baseball Tournament in Roxboro.

Last Wednesday, the Indians rocked High Point 16-3, sending 14 batters to the plate in an 11-run eighth inning. They followed that win with another victory on Sunday, a 4-3 squeaker over Chapel Hill.

"All season long we've been trying to prepare for the tournament because we knew we'd face some very strong competition once we got there," says Rip Wilkins, manager of the Indians. "If the win against Chapel Hill, we faced one of the best pitchers that we've seen all year. We knew our defense would have to be good and we'd need good pitching to beat them."

"I'm very proud of the way our team gelled for the tournament," Wilkins says. "Our lineup had changed so many times prior to the tournament so that we could take a look at our younger guys, but, once we took the field against High Point, it seemed that everything came together."

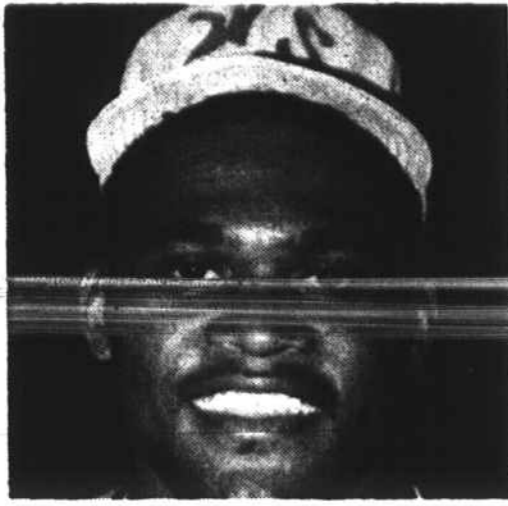
In the win over Chapel Hill, the Indians played their best defensive game of the year, committing only one error through nine innings of play. Brian Peterson pitched a gem, allowing one run through the first eight innings and striking out 10 batters before giving way to his brother, Jim.

"Our victory over Chapel Hill proved to me that we have a better team overall than the team that won the state title last year," says Wilkins. "We played good, strategic baseball, we sacrificed when we needed to, we ran the bases well and we came up with some timely scores."

Rodney Johnson, Mike Gill, Gary Matherly and Teska "T.K." Dillard have led the Indians offensively during the tournament. Of the four, Wilkins has been pleased most with the development of Dillard.

"Teska has really had his eye on the baseball this past week," Wilkins says of his designated hitter. "He came in later than the other players but in the last couple weeks his bat has started to really come around."

Dillard, who was the starting catcher for Florida A&M University this past season, called



Teska Dillard

Wilkins from his home in Texas just four weeks ago, saying he wanted to rejoin the club. Last season, Dillard played an important role in the Indians' championship drive.

An electrical engineering major at Florida A&M, Dillard works for Wilkins' company (Rip's Painting and Decorating) to pay his expenses while he plays for the Indians.

Wilkins also is excited about the pitching his team has acquired this season.

"We have eight pitchers that we can go to when, last year, we had less than half that many," says Wilkins. "We have a good trio of starters in Jim Peterson,

Brian Peterson and Steve Wagner. We also have strong relievers in the bullpen that come in and set down the order".

The Indians' bullpen consists of Scott Tretheway, Gary Groce, Keith Sherrod and Jeff Tuttle.

With just three more wins, the team could notch its second consecutive state title, a feat that Wilkins says will be a tough challenge.

"We are in the toughest bracket in the tournament," he says. "High Point, Danville, Chapel Hill and the Winston-Salem Pond Giants were all paired in the same bracket as us. Each one of those teams is very good."

Already the Pond Giants have been ousted from the double-elimination tournament, while the Indians are the only team in their bracket with an undefeated slate.

"If we can win our next game (Friday, July 27), we'll have an excellent chance to make it back to Wichita (Kan.) for the National Finals," says Wilkins. "If we do, I think we'll have an excellent chance of finishing among the top teams there."

"Our record is only 17-8, but that's mainly because we played so many people," Wilkins continues. "Our bench is stronger than most starting teams on the semi-pro level. We could probably be about 22-5, but it's not important to have a super record. Our goal is to do well in the finals in Wichita."



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