



SAFE ON CLOSE PLAY - North Gaston's Brent Payton slides into home on a hit by Jason White in Wednesday's state 3-A playoff game at KM's Lancaster Field. North Gaston grabbed an early lead and held on for a 5-3 win which eliminated the defending state champion Mountaineers from the playoffs.

Mounties Lose To North Gaston In Third Round Of State Playoffs

Kings Mountain's bid for a second straight state baseball championship ended Wednesday night at Lancaster Field when North Gaston's Wildcats stunned the Mountaineers 5-3 in the Western semi-finals.

The win was the third straight playoff victory over a conference championship team for the Wildcats, who finished third in the Southwestern 3-A Conference and had lost four straight games to the Mountaineers.

Kings Mountain finished its season with a 21-4 overall record and had a two-year mark of 44-11.

The Wildcats got a superb pitching performance from senior southpaw Chad Brown, who was a hard luck loser in three previous starts against the Mountaineers. He lost to the Mounties in both regular season SWC contests and in the Gaston Neighbors Tournament. Brown did not pitch in the SWC tournament championship game when KM defeated the Wildcats 12-1.

The Mountaineers out-hit the Wildcats, eight to six, but Brown was in control most of the way. He worked out of a jam without damage in the fifth inning when the Mountaineers put two runners on with only one out and got a game-ending double play in the bottom of the seventh after the Mounties scored two runs to cut into a 5-1 lead.

North Gaston grabbed a 2-0 lead in the top of the third on Jason White's two-run single, which was the first hit of the game off KM starter Chad Plonk. Of the first nine

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men to reach base for North Gaston, six reached on walks and two others gained life on errors.

The Mountaineers cut the margin to 2-1 in the bottom of the third on Chris Henson's sacrifice fly but North Gaston put the game away in the top of the fourth on back-to-back home runs by Brent Payton and David Duncan.

Chip Cash's bases-loaded sacrifice fly cut the lead to 5-2 in the bottom of the seventh and KM added its final run on Chad Plonk's single.

North Gaston Coach Jack Paysour, who had seen the Mounties come from behind to win three of their previous four games against his Wildcats, was determined that the Mountaineers would have to beat him without the powerful bat of state home run king Paul Brannon. After Brannon's sharp

two-out single to center with nobody on in the bottom of the first, Paysour ordered the big catcher walked in his other three trips to the plate.

Eric Peppard led the KM plate attack with three hits and Chad Plonk had two.

The win advanced the Wildcats into Saturday night's Western championship game against West Caldwell, with the winner earning a berth in the best-of-three state championship series.

Score by innings: R-H-E
 NG 002 300 0 5-6-1
 KM 001 000 2 3-8-3

Brown and Lemley; Chad Plonk, Chris Plonk (4) and Brannon.

WP - Brown (10-3); LP - Chad Plonk (8-3).
 HR - NG, Payton, Duncan.

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