

Vikings knock off WHS, 28-14

Written by Mike Kelly

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Avery High ended four years of frustration Friday night as the Vikings defeated Watauga 28-14 at Jack Groce Stadium.

And they have quarterback Alex Villanueva to thank for it. The junior, who threw for nearly 1,900 yards last fall, has backboned Avery (3-0) to its best start in four years. And he put on a clinic on Friday night against the Pioneers.

Villanueva was 21-38 for 293 yards and four touchdowns (two rushing, and two passing). His 24-yard scoring strike to Andy Gonzalez with 5:24 to go put the contest out of reach.

"Alex had the kind of year I thought he would have last year," said Avery coach Darrell Brewer, who is in his seventh year at the helm. "He had his ups and downs. But he learned from his mistakes, and he's making much better decisions this season."

Villanueva did throw two interceptions on Friday night (the Pioneers have picked him off five times in his career), but he wasn't phased by those miscues.

He engineered four scoring drives, two of them in the fourth quarter, that sealed Watauga's (1-2) fate. A 10-play, 88-yard drive early in the final period gave Avery a 21-7 lead; and a nine-play, 61-yard march led to the Gonzalez touchdown.

That final drive was also aided by a roughing the passer penalty that gave Avery a first down at the WHS 25-yard-line, setting up the Gonzalez score.

"We just made too many mistakes," said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. "We were very inconsistent. We just have to keep working, and we'll get right back at it Monday."

The Pioneers were flagged 13 times for 108 yards. They only had 189 yards offensively. An Avery fumble late the first quarter (the Vikings turned it over four times), led to Watauga's first score. The Pioneers recovered at the Vikings 18 and punched it in six plays later on Baker Stanley's one-yard run.

But for the most part the offense sputtered, especially the running game, which only netted 77 yards. Caleb Watson finally jump-started the offense midway through the fourth quarter.

Trailing 21-7, Watson marched his team 71 yards in 11 plays and scored on a one-yard run, making it a seven-point game with 8:41 left. But the Pioneers couldn't get any closer.

"We were just a day late and a dollar short," Watson said. "We were just too inconsistent. But it's time to go to work. We're going back to practice with a strong workman-like attitude. No team is going to out work us for the rest of the season."

Watson, who ran for 43 yards, was 8-16 for 99 yards, but he also threw two interceptions.

Avery racked up 390 yards; Remington Austin was their leading receiver with five catches for 103 yards and a touchdown. Gonzalez finished with five catches for 73 yards and a score, and Kody Hughes, who really stepped it up in the second half, caught five balls for 56 yards.

Trey Kavanaugh of the Pioneers had three catches for 28 yards. Mo Gore had two receptions for 46 yards.

The Pioneers close out this two-game home stand next Friday night against West Stokes. Our coverage begins at 6:30 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Alex Fox suffered a knee injury after he intercepted his second pass of the season in the third quarter. He left the game and never returned. Fox had nine tackles before he was injured, raising his season total to 25 in three games.....the Pioneers made their first two

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turnovers of the season Friday night. But they're still a plus eight in turnover ratio.....Avery defeated WHS for the first time since 2005.; the Vikings also picked up their first win in Boone since 2004.....WHS still leads the all-time series 30-12-1.