

Indians Scalp Pioneers on Senior Night

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 06 November 2010 01:19

Bizarre plays, penalties and turnovers plagued Watauga High on Senior Night at Jack Groce Stadium on Friday night.

On a snowy, frigid night, the Pioneers hoping to keep their slim playoff hopes alive, dropped a 31-28 decision to St. Stephens in a Northwestern 3A/4A Conference game. The Pioneers also wasted their best offensive performance of the season in the process.

"I feel real bad for our seniors," said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. "They made some big plays tonight, but we didn't make enough of them. We put ourselves in a position to win the game, but we couldn't pull it off. It's a tough way for them to go out."

The loss also eliminated WHS (3-8 overall; 1-5 in the NW3A/4A) from post-season play for the first time in four years (2005). WHS was flagged 18 times for a school-record 210 yards and turned the ball over five times. As a matter of fact, those issues played a key role in setting up the Indians' (2-9; 2-4) winning drive in the fourth quarter.

With the game tied at 28-all, Dillon Spencer's second interception of the game (he had three on the night) gave the Indians a first-down at the WHS 38-yard-line with 2:13 to play. And the Indians, who were out of time outs, only managed four yards on that possession.

On third and six from the WHS 34, the Pioneers sacked quarterback Tanner Miller for an apparant five-yard loss. But WHS was flagged for a late hit, and it gave St. Stephens an automatic first down at the WHS 24. Three plays later, Cody Solesbee, who missed a 28-yard field goal attempt on the Indians' previous possession, nailed the game winner from 41-yards away against the wind with 45 seconds left.

"It's been a tough year for sure," said St. Stephens coach Fred Whalen. "But our kids have battled all year. I'm very proud of that. We've had to play a lot of young kids, and we've also had some key people get hurt. But these guys didn't quit."

Miller, the all-time leading passer in the modern era at St. Stephens (past records are incomplete), racked up 275 yards offensively. He was 12-24 for 170 yards and two touchdown passes; he also ran for 105 yards and scored twice.

"Tanner is our leader, without question," Whalen said. "He's the guy that makes us go. He doesn't look like much, but he's durable and strong. He's also deceptively fast."

The Indians tried an on-side kick following Solesbee's field goal, but the ball sailed out of bounds and gave WHS possession at its 47 with 34 seconds to play. But the Pioneers only managed two yards before Spencer picked off Caleb Watson at his 23 with 13 seconds left to seal Watauga's fate.

Baker Stanley, playing his final game as a Pioneer, turned in an excellent performance. The senior ran for 109 yards on 16 carries and scored twice. His final touchown, a one-yard run with 6:03 to play in the third quarter, gave WHS its final lead of the game at 21-14.

"It's my final game ever playing football," said Stanley, who wants to attend Appalachian State or North Carolina State next fall. "I gave 110 percent. I really wanted to win this game. Winning

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this game would have gone a long way in curing what was a very disappointing season." Watson, who was also playing his final game as a Pioneer, complimented Stanley's effort with 104 yards and a touchdown. He also hooked up with Mo Gore on a 62-yard bomb in the opening stanza that gave WHS an early 7-0 advantage.

The game actually turned in St. Stephens' favor with 6:25 to play in the first half. Stanley scored on a ten-yard run, giving WHS a 13-0 lead. But the extra-point try turned into a comedy of errors, penalties and confusion as the Pioneers were flagged three times for unsportmanlike conduct, and were pushed all the way back to their own 47-yard line.

In turn, Pruitt and senior Cam Haas were both ejected when Haas was flagged for doing back flips on a trick play during the two-point conversion attempt at the Indians 18-yard-line.

"I don't feel I deserved to be ejected," Pruitt said. "I hate I got kicked out and it's only the second time it's ever happened in my head-coaching career (the other time was at Cherryville). We were at the 18-yard-line. How many times are you going to make a two-point conversion from the 18.

"We met with the officials before the game and they didn't say anything about trick plays. I was the one that brought it up. I knew we were going to get flagged, but i decided to run the play anyway. Looking back at it, obviously it wasn't a good decision. But if he had told me he was kicking me out of the game for it, I would have never ran it."

That sparked St. Stephens as the Indians took the ensuing kick-off and marched 74 yards in just 58 seconds and got on the board. A 54-yard catch-and-run by Jon Sweet set up Miller's five-yard touchdown run, trimming Watauga's lead at 13-7. The Pioneers then fumbled on their next possession, giving St. Stephens great field position at the WHS 31.

Miller hooked up with Daniel Isenhour on fourth-and-goal on a three-yard scoring pass that gave the Indians a 14-13 lead at the break, setting the stage for a wild second-half finish.

NOTES: Watauga's three wins this season is their lowest win total since 2004 when the Pioneers only won two games.....The Pioneers only scored 139 points all season.....Going into Friday's game with St. Stephens, the Pioneers had 169 rushing yards in five league games.....Baker Stanley became Watauga's first running back to gain more than 100-yards rushing in a game since Baine Martin did it back in 2008.

	1	2	3	4	T
ST. STEPHENS	0	14	14	3	- 31
WATAUGA	7	6	8	7	- 28

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SCORING:

1 QTR:

2:59 WHS-WATSON 62 YD PASS TO GORE (PARSON'S KICK) 7-0

2 QTR:

6:25 WHS-STANLEY 10 YD RUN (PASS FAILED) 13-0

5:25 STS-MILLER 5 YD RUN (SOLESBEE'S KICK) 13-7

1:27- STS-MILLER 3 YD PASS TO ISENHOUR (SOLESBEE'S KICK) 14-13

3 QTR:

6:03 WHS-STANLEY 1 YD RUN (WATSON PASS TO GORE) 21-14

3:02 STS-MILLER 10 YD PASS TO SHUFORD (SOLESBEE'S KICK) 21-21

0:51 STS-MILLER 3 YD RUN (SOLESBEE'S KICK) 28-21

4 QTR:

9:35 WHS-WATSON 12 YARD RUN (PARSON'S KICK) 28-28

0:45 STS-SOLESBEE 41 YD FIELD GOAL 31-28

FIRST DOWNS: STS 19, WHS 18

RUSHING YARDS: STS 115, WHS 271

PASSING YARDS: STS 170, WHS 81

TOTAL YARDS: STS 285, WHS 352

PENALTY YARDS: STS 6-52, WHS 18-210

TURNOVERS: STS 1, WHS 5

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STS:

RUSHING: MILLER 25-105

PASSING: MILLER 12-24 170

RECEIVING: ELLIS 4-53, SHUFORD 4-37

WHS:

RUSHING: STANLEY 16-109, WATSON 16-104

PASSING: WATSON 2-7-3 75

RECEIVING: GORE 2-75