

The Watauga High men's and women's basketball teams pulled off a pair of huge wins on Saturday afternoon at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

The WHS women staved off a stubborn Alexander Central team and defeated the Cougars 57-48. The win clinches a tie for the No.3 seed in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference. WHS (11-10 overall; 6-4 NW3A/4A) now owns a two game lead on Fred T. Foard with a game in hand for third place. The win also gives the Pioneers a shot at their first winning season in 11 years. "This is huge," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "Gaining the No.3 seed is huge for two reasons. First of all, it gives us at least three all-conference selections; secondly, it allows us to avoid the top seed, Hickory, until the conference finals, if we're fortunate to get there." But the Pioneers got off to a sluggish start. They trailed 4-0 before Hannah Shipp hit a running one hander and Anna Church, who finally got back in the lineup after missing more than two weeks with a concussion, hit a three from the corner that gave WHS a 5-4 lead and put the Pioneers on top to stay.

The freshman Savanna Wood finished with eight points, all of them in the first half, and her three ball at the horn just before halftime gave WHS a 25-15 lead at the break.

"We got a lot of contributions from a lot of people tonight," Anderson said. "And Savanna just keeps getting better each time out. She hit a big three just before halftime that gave us a double-digit lead."

But the Cougars (7-13; 3-7) kept chipping away, and they got within four at 48-44 with 2:58 left. The Pioneers staved off the rally thanks to some nifty free-throw shooting down the stretch. The Pioneers made eight consecutive free throws to ice the game away.

"Our free throw shooting was up-and-down tonight," Anderson said. "But we buckled down at the end and made them. Alexander Central has really improved. (Coach) Matt (Taylor) has done a great job with the program, and like us, they're slowly climbing up the ladder of success."

Brooke Rhodes led WHS with 13 points; Wood had eight, Church and Shelby Gilliam each had seven. Marie Richie led the Cougars with 19 points.

In the men's game, the Pioneers got off to a roaring start, built a 19-5 lead after one, and led 22-5 early in the second quarter before the Cougars came charging back. But the Pioneers survived the comeback effort and defeated the Cougars 60-55.

The win allowed WHS to clinch a tie for the No.2 seed in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference, and it also gives WHS (15-6 overall; 8-2 NW3A/4A Conference) the inside track for the No.1 seed among the Class 4A schools in the conference. The Pioneers have also won a season-high six games in a row.

"We've done exactly what I wanted us to do after that loss at Hickory (on January 19)," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "Our goal was to go into senior night (in a rematch with Hickory Tuesday night) with only two conference losses, and we've done that. I'm very proud of how our

WHS Sweeps Alexander Central

Written by Mke Kelly

Saturday, 05 February 2011 22:26

team has responded since losing that game."

But the Cougars (9-11; 5-5), mired in a three-game losing streak, got within ten point at the break; and they got within three midway through the third quarter. But the Pioneers, who battled foul trouble for the majority of the game, relied on their strong perimeter game to stave off the rally.

Jake Pifer hit five trifectas on the night, including three in the second half, and Casey Quinn, who was scoreless in the first half, came to life with three three-point shots during that third-quarter outburst. That effort resulted in a 15-4 run and turned a 31-28 lead into 46-32 advantage.

The Cougars got within 54-51 on a bucket by Alex Ayer with 2:38 left in the game, but never got any closer as a three ball by Damian Edwards put WHS on top by six and put the contest out of reach.

"When we get into a rhythm like we did there in the third quarter during that run, we're tough to stop," Sanders said. "We hit some big shots. But give Alexander Central credit. We told our guys this team would fight them to the end, and they did. But unlike our loss at their place (in Taylorsville on January 15), we maintained our shooting touch tonight."

Edwards paced WHS with 22 points; Pifer finished with 17; Quinn had nine. In all, the Pioneers buried 12 three-point shots. Eight of those in the second half. Daniel Rauscher led the Cougars with 19 points; Brennan James finished with 17.

The Pioneers also played the majority of the second half in deep foul trouble. Will Koppenhaver, Edwards and Caleb Watson each played with four fouls a piece for the better part of the fourth quarter. Quinn played with three.

"But our guys hung in there and played smart," Sanders said. "This is a huge win for us for the No.2 seed. It also gives us a lot of momentum and confidence going into the Hickory game Tuesday night. Call me crazy, but I really feel this team can win out."

The WHS men and women entertain Hickory Tuesday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

WOMEN:

	1	2	3	4	T	
ALEXANDER CENTRAL	6	9	16	17	-	48
WATAUGA	11	14	14	18	-	57

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ALEXANDER CENTRAL: RICHIE 19, COCKRELL 10, RHYNE 3, SETZER 5, SHACK 7, LOOPER 2, PENNELL 2.

WHS: RHODES 13, WOOD 8, MARGOLIS 2, CHURCH 7, SHIPP 5, WRIGHT 5, GILLIAM 7, ALFORD 4, HARRELSON 6.

MEN:

	1	2	3	4	T		
ALEXANDER CENTRAL		5	11	20	19	-	55
WATAUGA	19	7	20	14	-		60

ALEXANDER CENTRAL: RAUSCHER 19, JAMES 17, FEAMSTER 2, CROUCH 2, AYER 4, MECIMORE 6, MOHON 3, BOWMAN 2.

WHS: EDWARDS 22, PIFER 17, WATSON 4, QUINN 9, KOPPENHAVER 7, HALL 1.