

Pioneers Lose; Edwards Suspended

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 12 February 2011 10:22

It wasn't what Watauga High men's basketball coach Rob Sanders had in mind.

The Pioneers had won seven in a row and they were coming off an emotional victory at home against Hickory Wednesday night that nailed down the No.2 seed in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference. And the last thing Sanders wanted was a letdown in the regular-season finale against St. Stephens Friday night.

Well, that letdown turned into a nightmare. The Pioneers not only lost the game 65-50, but one of Watauga's best players, Damian Edwards, was hit with three technical fouls and is out for the next three games---which means he won't be available for the NW3A/4A Conference tournament that begins on Monday. The suspension, depending on how far WHS (16-7 overall; 9-3 in the NW3A/4A Conference) goes in the tournament, could possibly leak over into Watauga's first-round state playoff game on Monday, February 21.

"It was certainly disappointing," Sanders said. "We played our worst 16 minutes of basketball in the second half. We lost our composure and they just outplayed us. It was a huge letdown we didn't need. We came out and went through the motions, and they were determined and came out with a lot of fire. They simply outplayed us."

According to North Carolina High School Athletic Association rules, if a player or coach is ejected, that individual must serve a two-game suspension. Edwards, who was held to a season-low two points by the Indians Friday night, was ejected with 4:06 left in the fourth quarter.

Edwards, who received his first technical in the first quarter, picked up back-to-back technicals in the final stanza within moments of each another. The last one as he was leaving the floor when he fouled out.

Watauga High Principal Michael Wyant released a statement at the beginning of the school year that if a player or a coach was ejected from a game, they would serve an additional one-game suspension, that would be added on to his current two-game suspension.

"That's Mr. Wyant's rule," Sanders said. "So, we won't have Damian for the conference tournament next week, and depending how far we go in the conference tournament, that penalty could leak over into our first state playoff game."

The Indians (18-5; 8-4), who snapped a three-game losing streak against the Pioneers dating all the way back to 1996-97, took control of the game late in the first quarter. With the game tied at 11, the Indians put together a 5-0 run to close out the period, taking a 16-11 lead. From there, the Pioneers disappeared offensively. They only scored five points in the second quarter and trailed by 14 at halftime.

Will Koppenhaver, who fouled out with 4:37 left in the game, ignited a small comeback in the third period. He scored six consecutive points and got WHS within eight. A bucket by Caleb Watson made it 30-24 with 4:50 to go in the period. But a three-point play by Harrison Bowne put the Indians back up by nine and they pulled away from there. The lead eventually grew to

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16 points in the fourth quarter.

"We just told our guys after the game, 'remember what this feels like,'" Sanders said. "If everything works out statistically, we should see these guys again on Tuesday (in the conference semifinals). This game tonight has given (St. Stephens) a lot of confidence. But what they don't realize is that they saw us play the worst basketball game we could ever play. The fact is we're better than what we showed tonight."

Jake Pifer led WHS with 16 points; Koppenhaver had 14, Casey Quinn finished with 12. Bowne led the Indians with 20 points, Andrew Zachrich had 15. The Pioneers return home to play Fred T. Foard in the opening round of the NW3A/4A Conference tournament Monday night. The WHS women play Hibriten at 6:30 pm. Our coverage begins at 6 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The WHS JV teams both lost on Friday. The girls lost to St. Stephens, 34-21. Tosha Wilson had six points to lead the Pioneers; the boys lost 47-43. Colin Augustine finished with 15 points.....Luke Hall missed Friday's game with a dislocated shoulder; Ethan Poulos was out with the flu. Ryan Bahlmann of the Indians dressed but did not play. He has a pinched nerve in his lower back.

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WATAUGA	11	5	19	15	- 50
ST. STEPHENS	16	14	15	20	- 65

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WHS: PIFER 16, KOPPENHAVER 14, QUINN 12, WATSON 4, EDWARDS 2, POGOLOFF 2.

STS: JAMES 2, McCARTHERN 5, HOUSTON 1, ZACHRICH 15, MILLER 6, SPENCER 2, GRIER 8, BOWNE 20, McLEOD 6.