

The Watauga High men's basketball team may have seen its dream season come to a disappointing finish, but the Pioneers did get the last laugh afterall.

Rob Sanders has been named the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Coach of the Year---the first time he's captured this lofty award. And senior Damian Edwards, the backbone of the WHS team, was named the NW3A/4A Conference Player of the Year.

Will Koppenhaver was the only other WHS player named to the all-conference squad. The Pioneers, who lost to Charlotte Vance in the opening round of the state playoffs, finished the year at 17-9. This graduating senior class won a combined total of 48 games the last three years.

"It's so tough to say good-bye to this group," Sanders said. "They spoiled us the last three years. They're a special group of guys. We're really going to miss them."

And Sanders, who has been at the helm the last seven years, is currently 97-83 with the Pioneers.. He's 48-30 the last three seasons, and he's led WHS to the state playoffs five consecutive times. He also produced Watauga's first state playoff victory in 20 years, when the Pioneers defeated East Burke in 2007-08. He led the Pioneers to their first sectional appearance in 30 years last season, and he also led WHS to its first victory against Hickory since 1993 this past season.

Edwards turned in a monster year and capped off this career averaging 19 points, 5.8 rebounds, 3.5 assists, and 4.1 steals-a-game. He also set a new school record for steals in a single season with 94 and with his 957 career points, he is 4th on the all time scoring list.

Koppenhaver, who like Edwards was a three-year varsity player, averaged 11.2 points, and led the team in field goal and free throw shooting percentage. He shot 56.1% from the field, and 75.8% from the foul line. He also averaged 5.9 rebounds, 2 assists, and 1.3 steals-per-game. And Casey Quinn was named honorable mention.

The WHS senior point guard, who also a three-year varsity starter, averaged 7.5 points, 3.5 rebounds, 8.1 assists, and 3.8 steals and only , 2.1 turnovers per game. His turnover-to-assist ratio was a whopping 4 to 1. His 8.1 assists per game are a school record, and he also set the record for most assists in a game with 16, most assists in a season with 210, and tied Mike King

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Written by Mike Kelly

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as the all time career assists leader with 479.

Hickory (26-4), the Red Tornadoes, who won both the regular season and tournament championships, had three selections: Drew Hilton, Denzel Dillingham and Trez Shuford. The Red Tornadoes reached the Class 3A Western Regional finals, where they were eliminated by Hunter Huss Saturday night in Greensboro.