

Chambers Fulfilling His Goal

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga High football team hasn't had a solid running game since Eric Breitenstein (currently a red-shirt junior at Wofford College) graduated in the spring of 2008.

And the lack of a running game has hurt the Pioneers. During that four-year stretch, they were 14-21 coming into this season. And to make matters worse, the Pioneers, who only won three games last fall, missed the playoffs for the first time since 2005.

But WHS senior Kyle Chambers seems to have changed all that. For a guy that saw his junior year end on a scary note with a serious neck injury (against Hibriten October 8 of last season), Chambers has become WHS's best running back in four years. And following a slow start (he was held to minus three yards in the season opener against A.C. Reynolds on August 19), Chambers has become a nightmare and a huge concern for opposing defenses.

In his last three games, Chambers has piled up 464 yards and eight touchdowns; he ran for a career-high 183 yards and four touchdowns against Avery on September 2, and he followed that up with 161 yards and two touchdowns in a lopsided win against West Caldwell Friday night.

The end result, the Pioneers (2-2), who begin Northwestern 3A/4A Conference play next week at home against Fred T. Foard, must be considered a threat among league opponents. But for Chambers, who survived that frightening episode last season, is just glad to be back.

"I don't remember anything about that injury," he said. "All I know, I was pretty scared. But I'm over it now. I had no fears coming back. and I was determined to have a big senior year. I'm thankful for the chance to play again."

And so are the Pioneers. They have 461 rushing yards through their first four games, and Chambers has the majority of that yardage. He's rambled for 452 yards (an average of nearly seven yards-per-carry) and has scored eight of WHS's ten rushing touchdowns.

"Kyle was real dedicated this off season," said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. "He really worked hard in the weight room preparing himself for a big season. He's, without question, our fastest and strongest guy. He really put in the work to prepare himself for his senior year. And he's also doing a great job getting to the outside when he runs the ball. He's a strong guy."

And Chambers took it a step further by running track for the Pioneers last spring. He ran in the sprint events, and he ran a leg on the 4x100-meter relay team.

"It really made me faster," chambers said. "The coaches really worked with me on improving my speed. I really wanted to get faster. And it's paid off. I really feel a lot quicker out there; I'm running with a lot of confidence."

And his efforts haven't gone unnoticed. Avery coach Darrell Brewer was real concerned about Chambers. So was West Caldwell coach Randy Baldwin.

"He's a load to bring down," Baldwin said. "You have to stop him at the point of attack, or if he gets into the secondary, look out," Baldwin said. "He's very strong, and very hard to bring down."

"Chambers is a legitimate back," Brewer said. "He has one thing in mind, and that's scoring touchdowns. He knows how to find the hole, and he hits it quick."

And Chambers lived up to the hype by running for 344 yards and scoring six times against the Vikings and the Warriors in consecutive games. And the Pioneers, who lost five of their last six

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games last season and posted their worst record (3-8) since 2004, are aiming their sights on their first winning season in five years.

"The (current seniors) had a meeting after last season," Chambers said. "The way things ended really left a bad taste in our mouths. We knew we were far better than that as a team. But things just didn't work out for us. We didn't want a repeat of that this season. For all of us, it's our last chance to play here. That's why this senior group is so determined to turn things around."

And the results have been pretty good, so far. But the real season begins next Friday night, September 16, in the NW3A/4A Conference opener against Fred T. Foard at Jack Groce Stadium. The Pioneers were 1-5 in league play last season and finished next-to-last in the standings. And their only win came against the Tigers

"Our goal is to win each of our seasons," Pruitt said. "We're 2-2 right now in the non-conference season with one more game coming up (against Elizabethon on September 30), and we also want to win our conference season. I really feel the league is wide open. I feel we can do some good things. The goal is getting back to the state playoffs."

And Chambers is the key. If he continues his torrid pace, the senior is looking at a 1,000-yard campaign, and the Pioneers are looking at their first playoff appearance in two years. And the ultimate reward for Chambers would be playing college football next fall.

"I'm impressed with Kyle," Breitenstein said. "He's a real strong guy, and he runs hard. If he keeps running straight ahead, he's going to have a big year for the Pioneers. Yes, I think he can play in college. It's just a matter of getting that opportunity. Hopefully, he'll get that chance." So does Chambers.