

Pioneers Rally, Down Spartans

Written by Mike Kelly

Tuesday, 14 February 2012 09:47

The slam dunk by Watauga High senior Jake Pifer to end Monday night's game against South Caldwell climaxed a furious second-half rally as the Pioneers defeated the Spartans 69-62 at Lentz-Eggers Gym in the opening-round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament. Pifer

pace the Pioneers (the No.4 seed, and 10-13 overall) with a team-high 23 points. He erupted for 18 of those points in the second half. Matt Proffitt chipped in with 17 points, 12 coming in the second half. He also had a game-high 12 rebounds.

The Pioneers took control by outscoring the Spartans 23-7 in the third quarter. That wiped out a 33-25 halftime deficit and gave WHS a 48-40 lead after three. The Pioneers closed out the frame on a 13-3 run.

"They simply beat us up in the third quarter," said South Caldwell coach Lee Swanson. "They were extremely physical, they attacked us and just took over. They knocked us on our heels and we never responded."

It was a much-needed win for a team that had lost five of its last seven games coming in. And the win also avenged a 17-point loss to the Spartans (the No.5 seed, 10-14) in Sawmills back on February 3.

"We couldn't do anything right that night," said WHS senior Ethan Poulos, who had four points and ten assists. "Their locker room was very close to ours and we could hear them and how excited they were

about beating us that night. I have no clue where this has been all year, but we played great tonight. The JV guys gave us a spark, Jake had a great game, Matt was awesome. It was just a great night all the way around."

The Pioneers eventually built their lead to 13 points in the final stanza. The Spartans chipped away, but they never got any closer than six points with 43 seconds left. The win moves WHS into the conference

semifinals for the sixth consecutive year. And the Pioneers will see a familiar foe in Hickory Wednesday night, a team that's beaten them seven times in their last eight meetings. The Red Tornadoes, the No.1

seed in the tournament, are ranked sixth in the state in Class 3A this week by NCPreps.com.

"They've beat us twice this year," said junior Allan Koppenhaver, who finished with a season-high 11 points. "But we won tonight, and this gives us another chance to play them again. This was a big for us. And I give a lot of credit to the JV guys. They came out with a lot of energy (to start the second quarter) and that fired us up. It really ignited our third quarter run."

Koppenhaver was WHS's most reliable weapon in the first half as he poured in nine points. And the Pioneers, who had a brief lead in the first half, found themselves trailing by as many as nine points in

the first half. But the Pioneers spoiled any hopes the Spartans had of winning the game thanks to their third-quarter rally.

And the drought continues for South Caldwell. The Spartans haven't won in Boone since the 2003-04 season.

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"We really jelled tonight, especially in the second half," Poulos said. "We came out and played hard. We shared the ball, we ran the floor well, and we scored. We want to keep playing. We had to get the job

done, and we did that. It's been tough at times this season, but we want to finish strong. Now, we get to play Hickory Wednesday."

Jordyn Probst led the Spartans with 24 points; Conner Drum had 12; Jared Mask finished with nine points. The Pioneers travel to Hickory to play the top-seeded Red Tornadoes at Craft Gymnasium Wednesday night at 6:30 p.m. Our coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Cameron Baker and Jake Chasteen scored their first varsity points last night. Baker finished with four points; Chasteen had two on a pair of free throws.

WHS 69, SOUTH CALDWELL 62

SCORE BY PERIODS 1ST 2ND 3RD 4TH TOTAL

SOUTH CALDWELL 17 16 7 22 62

WATAUGA 15 10 23 21 69

SOUTH CALDWELL: WINGATE 5, HODGE 2, REDDING 6, EVANS 4, PROBST 24, DRUM 12, MASK 9.

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WHS: PIFER 23 (6 REBOUNDS, 4 ASSISTS), POULOS 4 (10 ASSISTS, 5 REBOUNDS), PROFFITT 17 (12 REBOUNDS), HOWSER 4 (5 REBOUNDS), JESSE CHASTEEN 2, KOPPENHAVER 11, STURGILL 2, BAKER 4, JAKE CHASTEEN 2.

WHS WOMEN FALL IN TOURNAMENT OPENER

The Watauga High women's basketball team dropped a 66-46 decision at Fred T. Foard in Newton, N.C. Monday night in the opening-round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference tournament. It was WHS's (No.5 seed and 7-16 overall) earliest exit from the conference tournament in three years (2008-09).

The win moves Fred T. Foard (No.4 seed overall, 14-10) into the conference semifinals against Hickory at Craft Gymnasium. The Red Tornadoes (23-1) are the No.1 seed and they're also ranked No.1 in the state in Class 3A this week by NCPreps.com. The Tigers advanced on the strength of their free-throw shooting. They made 30-of-32 free throws (93.7 percent) on the night, which included 18 straight in the final period. against the Pioneers. And thanks to that effort, the Tigers outscored WHS 26-13 in the fourth quarter.

"That's a number that if you're fortunate to have that number on your side, you're not going to lose many basketball games," WHS coach Klay Anderson said. "I know some of those fouls were skewed because we had to foul the last three or four minutes, but they stepped up to the line and left no doubt. They're an outstanding basketball team and they've got great length." Watauga struggled to stay close after taking a 15-13 first-quarter lead. The Pioneers, after scoring the first two points in the second period on a pair of free throws by Kalie Eppley, did not score again

until Tasha Wilson's putback try with 2:02 left in the first half. By then, Foard rallied to take a 26-20 lead. But the Pioneers got within 26-25 before Chelsea Hoyle of the Tigers buried a three to give Foard a 29-25 halftime lead.

WHS trailed 35-33 when Hannah Margolis picked up her fourth foul with 3:10 left in the third

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quarter. Margolis, who scored all of Watauga's eight points in the period, did not return until the final period.

Foard scored the final five points of the third quarter to take a 40-33 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Margolis led the Pioneers with 14 points. Savanna Wood made three 3-pointers and finished with 11 points. Whitney Dunnigan added nine.

"I'm really proud of what we did," Anderson said. "I'm proud of the way we fought. We thought we had a good game plan to frustrate them early and we did. It really hurt us to get Margolis and (Haleigh)

Wallace in foul trouble. But we played through just like we have done all year."

Chelsea Turner made all eight of her foul shots and finished with 21 points. Kayla Whitworth made all nine of her foul shots and added 15 points. Brooke Robinson added 13 points and grabbed seven rebounds.

She made 7-of-9 free throws.

"(Foard's) girls were here last year," Anderson said. "Most of them were on the varsity, so they've had a couple of years experience. Foard is outstanding. Robinson and Turner are a handful and they've got good role players to go around them."

FOARD 66, WHS 46

SCORE BY PERIODS	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	TOTAL
WATAUGA	15	10	8	13	46
FRED T. FOARD	13	16	11	26	66

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WHS: WOOD 11, DUNNIGAN 9, WALLACE 2, EPPLEY 2, SEAMONE 2, MARGOLIS 14, WILSON 2, McNEILL 2, WELSH 2.

FOARD: DANNER 2, HALL 8, GETTYS 2, HOYLE 5, ROBINSON 13 (7 REBOUNDS), WITWORTH 15, TURNER 21.

Photo Courtesy: Jake Pifer, by Bill Sheffield, WHS Athletics