

Parsons' Lifts WHS In Conference Opener

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 15 September 2012 12:58

It's been quite a week for Watauga High senior Alex Parsons. First of all, Parsons had a pair of goals in last Wednesday's upset win against No.4 Hickory (in Class 3A) in soccer. He scored the game-tying goal, and he added an empty-

net insurance goal to settle the issue in a 3-1 win as the Pioneers snapped Hickory's 32-match winning streak in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference.

But Parsons wasn't through. He capped off his memorable week with a game-winning, 39-yard field goal as time expired against Fred T. Foard Friday night at Tiger Stadium in Newton, N.C., in the NW3A/4A Conference opener for both teams. That magical kick from the left hash mark gave WHS a hard-fought 28-27 win, and it spoiled Foard's homecoming festivities. The win also handed WHS (4-1 overall; 1-0 NW3A/4A) its fourth win in a row and its best start since 2008. Ironically, the Tigers tried calling a time out just before the kick, but the officials said they were out of time outs.

"But the back judge said we had one left," said FTF coach Jason Phelps. "It was a tough call, and it went against us. But their kicker nailed it under pressure. I had some words with the officials to make them re-kick it because of the time out issue, but they wouldn't do it."

"It was a great way to end the week," Parsons said. "I would have preferred the other (right side) hash mark, because playing soccer, I can pull the ball. But I had faith in myself that I could make that kick. We have worked on situations like this in practice. And there's always a coach in my ear trying to create a situation like this, but it can never be like the atmosphere surrounding this game tonight. It's been an awesome week winning three big games like we did."

Parsons' kick capped off a wild fourth quarter that saw both teams combine for 30 points. The Pioneers, thanks to Zach Tomer who recovered an on-side kick by the Tigers with 36 seconds left, gave WHS the ball at its 42-yard-line. The Tigers were called for interference on the play (the high school rule states that an on-side kick must hit the ground before it can be recovered). And quarterback Tripp Taylor took over from there as he marched his team into field-goal range. His 16-yard run on first down gave the Pioneers a first down at the Tigers 42 with 23 seconds left. And a clutch pass to Sub Steury with six seconds left gave WHS a first down at the 22, setting the stage for Parsons' late-game heroics.

"All that went through my mind on that game-winning drive was to run it like we do in practice everyday," Taylor said. "I just focused on getting us down field. I just wanted to run the plays correctly. Sub is a dependable receiver. He's got sticky hands. We ran that last play four times tonight, and we were successful every time. I trust his hands. It was nerve-racking that's for sure."

Taylor was 12-22 for 175 yards; Steury had four catches for 65 yards. Running back T.J. Poulos turned in a career night with 118 yards on 26 carries and he scored three touchdowns. His one-yard run with 1:15 to play allowed WHS to regain the lead at 25-21. But the Tigers (2-3; 0-1) responded on their next possession as quarterback Jacob Schmidt hooked up with Brendon Purkey on a 41-yard bomb to go up 27-25 with 37 seconds left. Purkey got behind Cam Baker on the play.

"Cam makes that play 99 out of 100 times," Taylor said. "It was just one of those games. We

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had faith in ourselves. I didn't watch Parsons' field goal. I had my back turned on the play. I would have had heart failure if I did watch it. It's great to beat Fred T. Foard on their homecoming night."

Baker made up for his miscue by blocking the extra point. The Pioneers had it in cruise control as they built an 18-0 lead with 2:06 left in the third quarter. Stephen Shirley booted a 38-yard field goal that gave the Pioneers their 18-point advantage. But the Tigers responded with 19 seconds left in the period. Sam Benfield, who ran for 192 yards on 18 carries, scored on a 63-yard run to put Foard on the board. His 55-yard scamper with 7:07 left in the fourth quarter cut WHS' lead to three at 18-15; an interception by Eric Hempal on WHS's next possession gave the Tigers a first down at the WHS 40.

And Schmidt punched it in two plays later on a 37-yard run through traffic that gave the Tigers their first lead at 21-18 with 2:35 to go. From there, the game went back-and-forth before Parsons' settled the issue.

"Jacob is our best athlete," Phelps said. "He's the guy we're building around. He did a great job bringing us back. Our guys played hard, but Watauga played harder. It's a tough loss, but we've got to get over it and go back to work Monday."

"We got a little sloppy with our tackling," said WHS coach Tom Wright. "But that's also the triple option. It's assignment football, and they did a great job executing their offense, especially in the fourth quarter. But our guys are so resilient. Give them all the credit. They never gave up on themselves. And we're blessed with two great kickers. Stephen and Alex are both kicking the ball so well that they're taking turns. It was just Alex's turn in that situation. We've got full confidence in both those young men. It was a crazy game, but our guys showed a lot of heart and character coming back."

NOTES: The Tigers outgained WHS 412-308. Foard ran for 330 yards....The Pioneers are 4-0 lifetime against the Tigers....Jason Phelps is 0-2 against his old school....The Pioneers are off to their best start since 2008. They also got off to a 4-1 start in 2007. The 2007 team finished 11-4 and lost to Mount Tabor in the Class 4A Western Finals. The 2008 team, following its 4-1 start, finished the year at 5-7....Poulos' 100-yard effort was the first 100-yard game by a Pioneer running back this season. The last 100-yard rusher for WHS was Kyle Chambers, who cracked the 1,000-yard barrier last season....The Pioneers are 7-6 in conference openers since 2000. They've won two in a row. The last time WHS lost its conference opener was in 2010 against South Caldwell....The last time WHS won a 28-27 win was against East Burke in 2001 in Icard. That was also Tom Harper's (now at Hickory) next to last game as head coach of the Cavaliers that season.

Scoring Summary

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Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Score

Watauga 0 8 10 10 - 28

Fred T. Foard 0 0 7 20 - 27

SCORING SUMMARY WHS -FTF

2nd

07:55 WHS TJ Poulos 1 yd run (Nick Williams pass from D. Mackey)
17 plays, 57 yards, TOP 5:50

3rd

07:50 WHS TJ Poulos 31 yd run (Alex Parsons kick)
2 plays, 32 yards, TOP 0:40

02:06 WHS Stephen Shirley 38 yd field goal
7 plays, -5 yards, TOP 2:54

00:19 FTF Sam Benfield 63 yd run (Rebecca Crawley kick)
3 plays, 70 yards, TOP 1:36

4th

07:07 FTF Sam Benfield 55 yd run (Jacob Schmidt rush)
7 plays, 76 yards, TOP 3:24

02:53 FTF Jacob Schmidt 37 yd run (Eric Hampel pass intcpt)
2 plays, 40 yards, TOP 0:55

01:15 WHS TJ Poulos 1 yd run (Alex Parsons kick)
5 plays, 54 yards, TOP 1:28

00:37 FTF Brenden Purkey 41 yd pass from Jacob Schmidt (Rebecca Crawley kick blockd)
5 plays, 80 yards, TOP 0:38

00:00 WHS Alex Parsons 39 yd field goal
4 plays, 36 yards, TOP 0:36

Team Statistics

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FIRST DOWNS: WHS 16, FTF 14
RUSHING YARDS: WHS 133, FTF 330
PASSING YARDS: WHS 175, FTF 82
TOTAL YARDS: WHS 308, FTF 412

PENALTY YARDS: WHS 7-79, FTF 12-121
TURNOVERS: WHS 2, FTF 1
TIME OF POSSESSION: WHS 24:31, FTF 23:29
3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 2-11, FTF 5-11
4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 3-6, FTF 1-2

RUSHING:

WHS - POULOS 26-118-3TD
FTF - BENFIELD 18-192-2TD

PASSING:

WHS - TAYLOR 12-22-2I-175
FTF - SCHMIDT 5-10-1I-1TD-82

RECEIVING:

WHS - BAKER 5-62, STEURY 4-65
FTF - THOMPSON 2-25

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FRIDAY'S GAMES

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A

WATAUGA 28, FRED T. FOARD 27

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ALEXANDER CENTRAL 41, ST. STEPHENS 0

SOUTH CALDWELL 36, HIBRITEN 29

PFAFFTOWN-REAGAN 16, HICKORY 6

OTHER GAMES....

BLACK MOUNTAIN-OWEN 21, AVERY 6

STARMOUNT 28, ASHE COUNTY 0

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SOUTH IREDELL 65, WEST CALDWELL 0

Photo Courtesy: Tripp Taylor, PHOTO SUBMITTED