The woes continue for the Watauga High football team. The Pioneers (4-4 overall; 1-2 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference), who began on the season on fire, have cooled off in a huge way of late. The Pioneers suffered their latest setback Friday night in Taylorsville. Alexander Central snapped a two-game losing streak

against the Pioneers with a 41-19 win at Cougars Stadium on Homecoming night. The win leaves Alexander Central (5-3; 4-0), winners of four straight, in a first-place tie with South Caldwell in the NW3A/4A Conference standings. The Spartans (8-0; 4-0) defeated Hickory 41-30 Friday night

The loss drops WHS into a third-place tie with Hickory, but the Red Torndoes (4-4; 1-2) won the tie breaker after they beat WHS two weeks ago (22-6 at Jack Groce Stadium on September 21).

The Cougars led all the way, but the Pioneers managed to keep things close. An eight-play, 53-yard scoring drive in the third quarter narrowed the gap at 27-19. But the Cougars, who moved the ball at will on the ground, put the game away with a pair of touchdowns in the final period.

Quarterback Luke Bean hooked up with Garrett Dupuis on an 18-yard TD pass on fourth-and-ten with 7:32 to play that gave Alexander Central a 34-19 lead. That scoring pass capped off a 12-play, 80-yard scoring drive. Defensive back Landon Thomas added the final touch with a 46-yard interception return with 4:54 left to settle the issue.

The Cougars out gained WHS 307-74 on the ground. The Pioneers have given up more than 900 yards rushing during this three-game slide. Making matters worse, the Pioneers, who are fighting the injury bug, lost two more players Friday night. Quarterback Tripp Taylor left the game in the third quarter with a head injury early in third quarter; lineman Kennon Foxx re-aggravated an ankle injury and left the game in the second half.

"We're pretty beat up right now," said WHS coach Tom Wright. "Tripp also hurt his jaw on that quarterback sack in the third quarter. We've got to get people back in the line up. Hopefully, we'll get Cameron Baker (thumb injury) back next week, and Collin (Augustine with a collar bone injury) might return as well. He's lightly practicing with us, but we'll get him some contact in practice this week and see where we stand. But we just didn't make the plays tonight, and they did. It's very frustrating."

One bright spot was quarterback Jay Harrill, who made his first varsity start Friday night. The WHS junior, who is playing football for the first time, was 7-13 for 81 yards with an interception. He's 13-20 for 139 yards in this last two appearances.

"The coaching staff told me I was going to start in the first half," said Harrill, who got the start after Taylor was benched for violating team rules. "They were coming with a lot of pressure. But it's my first year of playing football, so my fundamentals aren't perfect. We've got a tough game next week (with South Caldwell on Homecoming), so we just have be ready. We've got a week to prepare ourselves for it."

T.J. Poulos paced the WHS running game with 32 yards on 14 carries and a pair of touchdowns. He scored on a one-yard run in the third quarter that cut into Alexander Central lead at 20-12. But the Cougars responded on their very next possession as they marched 51-yards on five plays for a 27-12 advantage. Matt Quigley set up the scoring drive with his

45-yard kick-off return to the Alexander Central 49.
Poulos scored on a four-yard run on WHS' next possession with one minute left in the third period. That TD got WHS within striking distance before it all disappeared in the final 12 minutes of the game. Wade Norris set up Poulos' second TD as he forced a Bean fumble and recovered it at the cougars 14-yard-line.
The Cougars turned it over twice; the Pioneers turned it over three times. Nick Williams, despite a leg injury, caught four passes for 46 yards. Will Critcher led the WHS defense with 13 tackles, including a tackle-for-loss; DeWayne Mackey had eight stops with a TFL. The Pioneers return home to play South Caldwell Friday night on Homecoming.
NOTES: Taylor and linebacker Jimmy Accardi did not start Friday night because they violated team rules....The Cougars snapped a two-game losing streak against the Pioneers. Alexander Central leads the all-time series 21-15. The Pioneers have dropped two straight at Alexander Central dating back to 2009....The 41 points scored by Alexander Central Friday night were the most scored by the Cougars against WHS since a 49-14 win at Cougars Stadium in 2004.....Alexander Central coach Nick Bazzle was serving a two-game suspension Friday and was not at Cougars Stadium. Defensive coordinator Nathan Robinson coached the team. Robinson has been with the Alexander Central program for 11 years. Bazzle was suspended for two games for arguing a call at the Alexander Central-WHS JV game Thursday night in Boone. Bazzle will finish his suspension Thursday night, when the Cougars JV team plays Statesville. Bazzle will be back coaching the Cougars next Friday night when they take on Statesville at home.

SCORING SUMMARY

SCORE BY QUARTERS	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**TOTAL**
WATAUGA	0	6	13	0	- 19

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 6 14 7 14 - 41

1ST QTR
4:38 AC - RENEGER 4 YARD RUN (KICK FAILED) 6-58, 2:24
2ND QTR
11:50 W - SHUFORD 7 YARD RUN (KICK FAILED) 10-59, 4:41
5:23 A - ANDERSON 2 YARD RUN (KICK BLOCKED) 12-89, 6:19
0:55 A - RENEGER 3 YARD RUN (BEAN PASS TO SMITH) 7-35, 3:20
3RD QTR
5:55 W - POULOS 1 YARD RUN (PASS FAILED) 8-53, 2:27
3:18 A - ANDERSON 2 YARD RUN (QUIGLEY KICK) 5-51, 2:29
1:00 W - POULOS 4 YARD RUN (SHIRLEY KICK) 2-14, 0:29
4TH QTR
7:52 A - BEAN 18 YARD PASS TO DUPUIS (QUIGLEY KICK) 12-80, 5:08
4:54 A - THOMAS 46 YARD INTERCEPTION RETURN (QUIGLEY KICK)

STATISTICS

FIRST DOWNS: WHS 10, AC 20
RUSHING YARDS: WHS 74, AC 307
PASSING YARDS: WHS 106, AC 38
TOTAL YARDS: WHS 180, AC 345
TURNOVERS: WHS 3, AC 2
PENALTY YARDS: WHS 8-65, AC 9-79
POSSESSION TIME: WHS 20:21, AC 27:31
3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 5-11, AC 5-9
4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 1-2, AC 1-1

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING:
WHS: POULOS 14-32-2TD
AC: ANDERSON 16-105-2TD

PASSING:
WHS: HARRILL 7-13-INT-81, TAYLOR 2-5-INT-24
AC: BEAN 2-7-38-TD

RECEIVING:
WHS: WILLIAMS 4-46
AC: QUIGLEY 1-20, DUPUIS 1-18-TD

FRIDAY'S GAMES

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 41, WATAUGA 19
SOUTH CALDWELL 41, HICKORY 30
HIBRITEN 42, FRED T. FOARD 0
ST. STEPHENS 20, NORTH BUMCOMBE 10

OTHER GAMES.....

ASHE COUNTY 21, ALLEGHANY 12
POLK COUNTY 28, AVERY 7
EAST BURKE 33, WEST CALDWELL 7

NW3A/4A STANDINGS

SOUTH CALDWELL 4-0; 8-0
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 4-0; 5-3
HIBRITEN 2-1; 5-3
HICKORY 1-2; 4-4
WATAUGA 1-2; 4-4
ST. STEPHENS 0-3; 1-7
FRED T. FOARD 0-4; 2-6

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12

SOUTH CALDWELL @ WATAUGA
STATESVILLE @ ALEXANDER CENTRAL
ST. STEPHENS @ FRED T. FOARD
HIBRITEN @ HICKORY

Photo Courtesy: T.J. Poulos, Rob Moore