The Watauga High football team, searching for answers just a few weeks ago, seems to have solved the problem just in time. The Pioneers (5-6; 2-4 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) snapped their five-game losing streak by pounding

St. Stephens 43-21 on Senior Night at Jack Groce Stadium. Freshman quarterback Aaron Dobbins was at it again.

Dobbins hooked up with Cameron Baker on three touchdown passes, and Collin Augustine, in his second game back since breaking his collarbone on August 31, rambled for 88 yards and a pair of touchdowns. The Pioneers didn't waste any time jumping on the Indians (2-9; 1-5) as they scored on their first four possessions for a commanding 29-0 lead with 7:29 left in the first half.

"We came out with an urgency tonight," said WHS coach Tom Wright. "We knew we needed to win this game to secure a playoff spot, and we didn't waste any time jumping out to a big lead."

Dobbins was 11-13 for 265 yards; he's 30-42 (71%) for 435 yards and four TD the last two weeks. And Baker caught a new Jack Groce Stadium record six passes for 215 yards and three TD. The Pioneers outgained the Indians 201-5 in the first quarter, and the St. Stephens didn't picked up a first down until 10:34 remained in the first half. It was total dominiation by the Pioneers.

"The more I play, the more comfortable I feel," Dobbins said. "But Collin, Cameron and the offensive line really made it possible. Having Collin back there really gives our running game a boost, and it made the play-action pass a weapon tonight. The corner (back) bit pretty hard on our play-action fakes and Cam is pretty fast and he made some great catches. We really had a lot of people step up tonight, especially in the first half."

Dobbins and Baker hooked up on a 50-yard scoring toss on WHS' first possession of the game that capped off a four-play, 69-yard drive for a 7-0 lead; and those two hooked up again on an 89-yard TD pass with 7:29 left in the first half for a 29-0 advantage. Baker caught the ball at his 30-yard-line, spun away from a would-be tackler, and raced down the near sidelines.

"It's the best game I've had all season," Baker said. "We ran that play before (on the 89-yard scoring pass) against West Caldwell. You work your way upfield and hope the quarterback gets you the ball. Aaron is just a great quarterback. He finds his open receivers. We have a lot of energy right now."

But the Pioneers had their anxious moments. The Indians, who seemed confused and completely out of sync to start the game, finally got things going midway through the second quarter. The Indians marched 80 yards in 11 plays and scored on Marvin Sutton's one-yard run for their first points of the game. DeWayne Mackey, following a hit by Ky-Rawn Whifield, fumbled on the ensuing kick-off and the D.J. Lynch of the Indians recovered at the WHS 41.

It took the Indians just four plays to punch it in on Sutton's 23-yard run. A two-point coversion run by sophomore Marcus Payne (who left the game in the third quarter with a leg injury) made it 29-14 with 17 seconds left in the first half.

"And I got a little nervous when they punched that second one in," Wright said. "That fumble gave them new life and they were right back in the game."

And the Indians, who received the opening kick-off to start the second half, marched 78 yards

in 17 plays to make it 29-21. The drive took more than eight minutes. Davon Richardson, who replaced the injuried Payne, scored on a one-yard run to close out the scoring drive.
"But our defense really stepped it up from there," Wright said. "You have to give (St. Stephens) credit. They didn't lay down and quit. But we finally sealed things off against them in the fourth quarter, and that allowed us to pull away. It's a big win for us. This wil restore our confidence with the playoffs starting up next week. Hopefully, we can take the momentum of this game with us into next week."
The Pioneers put the game away by jumping on two opporunities in the final stanza. The Indians gambled on fourth down at their 39-yard-line and failed. The Pioneers scored six plays later on Augustine's four-yard run for a 36-21 lead with 2:21 to play; they sealed the issue on Mackey's seven-yard interception return for a TD.
"They were pounding the ball by running it right at us," Mackey said. "Their line was opening up the holes and they were running it right up in there. But we finally shut them down, especially in fourth quarter. It feels so much better when you win."
Sutton was St. Stephen's best weapon. He ran for 141 yards and a pair of TDs. He was also 9-13 passing for 92 yards. The Indians also held the ball for 30:48. In the second-and-third quarters combined, the Indians held the ball for nearly 19 minutes (18:56).
"It was frustrating when they started coming back," Augustine said. "They held the ball and kept it away from our offense. But we finally put them away. Cam played great tonight, and Aaron is really coming into his own. He makes good decisions back there. It was a big win for us and a good way to end the regular season."
The state playoff pairings will be announced late Saturday afternoon. Playoff coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM next Friday night.
NOTES: The Pioneers actually broke a six-game losing streak against the Indians dating back to the mid 1990's.....The Indians lead the all-time series, 7-5....Dobbins has hnot thrown an interceptions in the last two games.....Defensive lineman Taylor Shuford of the Pioneers was disqualified in the second quarter, but he will be eligible to return for WHS' state playoff opener....The Pioneers have only missed the state playoffs three times since 2004. The last time was in 2005....Senior Tripp Taylor, who suffered a broken jaw against Alexander Central (October 5), took the first snap of the game at quarterback before Dobbins took over.

Scoring Summary

Score by Quarters 1 2 3 4 Total

Saint Stephens	0	14	7	0 -	21
Watauga	22	7	0	14 -	43

1st
10:17 WHS - Cameron Baker 50 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (Alex Parsons kick), 4-69 1:43 0 - 7
04:32 WHS - Cameron Baker 7 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (DeWayne Mackey rush), 7-73 3:35 0 - 15
00:07 WHS - Collin Augustine 1 yd run (Stephen Shirley kick), 4-43 1:51 0 - 22
2nd
07:29 WHS - Cameron Baker 89 yd pass from Aaron Dobbins (Alex Parsons kick), 2-90 0:57 0 - 29
01:13 SSHS - Marvin Sutton 1 yd run (Marvin Sutton pass failed), 11-80 6:28 6 - 29
00:17 SSHS - Marvin Sutton 23 yd run (Marcus Payne rush), 4-41 0:44 14 - 29
3rd
03:50 SSHS - Davon Richardson 1 yd run (Tommy Vo kick), 17-78 8:04 21 - 29
4th
02:21 WHS - Collin Augustine 3 yd run (Stephen Shirley kick), 6-39 2:59 21 - 36
01:27 WHS - DeWayne Mackey 7 yd interception return (Alex Parsons kick) 21 - 43

Team Statistics

FIRST DOWN: SSHS 16, WHS 13
RUSHING YARDS: SSHS 228, WHS 121
PASSING YARDS: SSHS 92, WHS 265
TOTAL YARDS: SSHS 320, WHS 386
FUMBLES: NUMBER/LOST: SSHS 1-0, WHS 2-1
TURNOVERS: SSHS 1, WHS 1

PENALTY YARDS: SSHS 9-82, WHS 11-93
TIME OF POSSESSIONS: SSHS 30:48, WHS 17:12
3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: SSHS 5-12, WHS 2-5
4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: SSHS 2-4, WHS 2-2

Individual Statistics

RUSHING
WHS: AUGUSTINE 15-88-2TD
SSHS: SUTTON 20-141-2TD

PASSING
WHS: DOBBINS 11-13-265-3TD
SSHS: SUTTON 9-13-92-INT

RECEIVING
WHS: BAKER 6-215-3TD
SSHS: WHITFIELD 4-38

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

SOUTH CALDWELL 6-0; 11-0

HICKORY 4-2; 7-4

HIBRITEN 4-2; 7-4

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 4-2; 5-6

WATAUGA 2-4; 5-6

ST. STEPHENS 1-5; 2-9

FRED T. FOARD 0-6; 2-8

FRIDAY'S GAMES

WATAUGA 43, ST. STEPHENS 21

HIBRITEN 58, ALEXANER CENTRAL 51

HICKORY 63, FRED T. FOARD 0

SOUTH CALDWELL 33, R.S. CENTRAL 6

Photo Courtesy: Aaron Dobbins, Rob Moore