The Watauga High football team has everything to gain and nothing to lose Friday night. Afterall, the Pioneers (5-7), a wildcard team, are considered huge underdogs in their first-round state playoff game against Indian Trail-Porter Ridge (9-

1), the No.1 team among the Class 4A schools in the Southern Carolina Conference and ranked No.10 in the state in the final Associated Press Poll.

"And that's what I've been telling our players all week," said WHS coach Tom Wright. "Nobody is giving us any chance at all. But if we can keep this thing close going into the fourth quarter, they might break down. You never know. It's the playoffs and it's one game, and anything can happen."

But keeping the game close will be quite a challenge for WHS, a 14 seed in the west. The Pirates, the No.3 seed, have outscored their opponents 350-68, and they're beating their opponents by the whopping margin of 29-points a game.

"But we let down in our only loss of the year (a 7-0 loss to Weddington on October 12), and that was my fault," said Pirates coach Blair Hardin. "I did a poor job of preparing them. And that's what I've been preaching to our kids about all week. We're young and I feel we haven't played our best football yet. Plus, Watauga is well coached, and they've put points on the board. And they've done it against a pretty good schedule."

The Pirates feature a balanced attack, led by a pair of quarterbacks in Nick Vagnone, who also plays middle linebacker, and Zach Danielson. Those two have completed 67% of their passes for 1,161 yards, 12 touchdowns and four interceptions. Vagnone has a 112 quarterback rating; Danielson has a 96 QB rating.

"It's a two-headed monster," Hardin said. "And the funny thing is that Nick plays middle linebacker, too. He's been a linebacker since he started playing football. He's an aggressive kid (second on the team with 53 tackles and three quarterback sacks). And that really exemplifies our team. We don't have a lot of depth or size. Our biggest guy only weighs 260 pounds (Drew Lair), and we have a lot of people going both ways."

But the formula has worked to perfection in recent years. Hardin, now in his fifth year with the program, has led the Pirates to three consecutive SCC titles (they shared a tri-championship with Weddington and Sun Valley this season), and to the western finals the last two years.

"And our goal is to reach the state championship game," Hardin said. "Every year, our goal is to play the day after Thanksgiving, and to make it into December. We've come close the last two years, and we hope to do it again, but it won't be easy. We've been fortunate."

Chris Duffy leads the Pirates running game with 1,122 yards and 12 TDs. As a team, the Pirates have rushed for nearly 2,500 yards and 33 TDs.

"And it all starts with our offensive line," Hardin said. "Basically, the strength of our team is up front on both sides of the line. Like I said before, we're not that big, but we got some athletes and some folks that can run. But it all begins with those guys up front. They're the ones that get us going."

"They are real impressive up front, especially on the defensive side," Wright said. "They've got some size, and they're fast, they're an aggressive group. And they have excellent team speed. And we've had problems containing fast teams this year. We can't afford any mistakes. Not

against a team like this, especially if we want a chance to win this game."
But the Pioneers are coming off an impressive showing of their own in their season-finale last Friday night against St. Stephens. They put 43 points on the board, and quarterback Aaron Dobbins and wide receiver Cameron Baker hooked up six times for 215 yards and three TDs. And Dobbins has been nearly flawless in his last two games.
The freshman is 30-42 (71%) for 435 yards and four TDs with no intercepitions.
"That guy isn't a freshman anymore," Hardin said. "He plays like a junior. And I've told our guys, you can't let up on him. I really like that way he doesn't panic. He does a good job completing plays, and that's a concern."
Dobbins was 11-13 for a career-high 265 yards last week against the Indians. And Baker set a new Jack Groce Stadium record with his big receiving night.
"I'm not surprised by what Aaron has done," Wright said. "He's just blessed to be a quarterback, and he's really given us a nice weapon back there since Tripp (Taylor) went down (with a broken jaw against Alexander Central on October 5). And getting Cameron back was huge for us. He can play at the next level. He's gifted and he's given us a legitimate deep threat."
The Pioneers were also forced to battle the elements this week. An early winter storm forced the Pioneers to practice indoors Tuesday and Wednesday.
"The field (Jack Groce Stadium) was too slushy, so we practiced in (Lentz-Eggers) gym," Wright said. "But it goes with the territory up here. The weather is so unpredictable. You just have to be ready for whatever happens. But it hasn't bothered us."
This is the first meeting between the schools. And it's only the second time the schools have ever faced each other. The Pioneers and the Pirates met in baseball in the Class 4A sectional finals in 2011 in Indian Trail. And the Pirates eliminated WHS, 1-0. The winning run scored on an unearned run.
The Pioneers broke a three-game losing streak in the state playoffs last season. But they're 1-4 in post-season play since 2007. The winner of Friday's game between the Pioneers and the Pirates will play either Alexander Central or A.C. Reynolds in a second-round game Friday, November 9. If the Pioneers advance, they would be on the road. Coverage of Friday's game begins at 6:30 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Kicker Matt Wogan of the Pirates has been offered a full schloarship from the University of Oregan. According to his coach Blair Hardin, Wogan, who will handle all of Porter Ridge's kicking chores, has placed 95% of his kick-offs in the end zone, and he has a 44-yard punting average. "He's been quite a weapon for us, especially when it comes to field position," Hardin said. Wogan has made 45 extra points and five field goals this season; he's also scored two touchdowns.

STATE PLAYOFF SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2

CLASS 4-AA

EAST

No. 8 Raleigh Athens Drive (5-6) at No. 1 Garner (11-0)

No. 5 Wake Forest-Rolesville (9-2) at No. 4 Raleigh Wakefield (10-1)

No. 6 Raleigh Heritage (6-5) at No. 3 Raleigh Leesville Road (10-0)

No. 7 Wilmington Laney (5-5) at No. 2 Apex Middle Creek (10-1)

MIDEAST

No. 8 Cary (5-5) at No. 1 Richmond Senior (9-1)

No. 5 Cary Green Hope (6-5) at No. 4 Fuquay-Varina (6-4)

No. 6 Southern Pines Pinecrest (5-6) at No. 3 Hoke (9-2)

No. 7 Lumberton (5-5) at No. 2 Fayetteville Jack Britt (9-2)

MIDWEST

No. 8 West Forsyth (5-5) at No. 1 Matthews David Butler (10-0)

No. 5 Northwest Guilford (7-3) at No. 4 Charlotte Independence (9-2)

No. 6 Rocky River (7-4) at No. 3 Greensboro Page (6-4)

No. 7 Charlotte Providence (5-5) at No. 2 East Forsyth (11-0)

WEST

No. 8 Lake Norman (5-6) at No. 1 Charlotte Mallard Creek (9-1)

No. 5 Charlotte Myers Park (6-5) at No. 4 Charlotte Vance (8-3)

No. 6 West Mecklenburg (8-3) at No. 3 Cornelius Hough (9-2)

No. 7 McDowell (7-3) at No. 2 Charlotte Olympic (6-4)

CLASS 4-A

EAST

No. 8 Fayetteville Pine Forest (7-4) at No. 1 New Bern (10-0)

No. 5 Wilmington Hoggard (8-2) at No. 4 Southern Durham (6-4)

No. 6 Knightdale (7-3) at No. 3 Clayton (8-3)

No. 7 Southeast Raleigh (6-5) at No. 2 Wilmington New Hanover (9-1)

MIDEAST

No. 8 East Chapel Hill (5-5) at No. 1 Scotland County (9-1)

No. 5 Fayetteville Terry Sanford (7-4) at No. 4 Lee Senior (8-3)

No. 6 Southeast Guilford (6-5) at No. 3 Durham Hillside (8-2)

No. 7 Northern Durham (6-4) at No. 2 Fayetteville E.E. Smith (9-1)

MIDWEST

No. 8 Western Guilford (4-6) at No. 1 North Davidson (11-0)

No. 5 Pfafftown Reagan (8-3) at No. 4 Greensboro Dudley (6-4)

No. 6 Jamestown Ragsdale (7-3) at No. 3 Davie County (8-3)

No. 7 Winston-Salem Mount Tabor (5-5) at No. 2 High Point Central (9-2)

WEST

No. 8 Huntersville Hopewell (4-6) at No. 1 South Caldwell (11-0)

No. 5 Monroe Sun Valley (7-3) at No. 4 Asheville T.C. Roberson (9-1)

No. 6 Alexander Central (5-6) at No. 3 Asheville A.C. Reynolds (8-2)

No. 7 Watauga (5-6) at No. 2 Indian Trail Porter Ridge (9-1)

CLASS 3-AA

EAST

No. 8 Greenville D.H. Conley (7-4) at No. 1 Erwin Triton (10-0)

No. 5 Cleveland (10-1) at No. 4 West Brunswick (5-5)

No. 6 Southern Nash (8-2) at No. 3 Wilson Hunt (10-0)

No. 7 Hope Mills Gray's Creek (8-3) at No. 2 Raleigh Cardinal Gibbons (10-0)

MIDEAST

No. 8 Asheboro (4-7) at No. 1 Northern Guilford (10-0)

No. 5 Chapel Hill (8-3) at No. 4 Fayetteville Douglas Byrd (8-3)

No. 6 Western Alamance (8-3) at No. 3 Spring Lake Overhills (6-4)

No. 7 Fayetteville Westover (4-7) at No. 2 Southern Guilford (9-1)

MIDWEST

No. 8 Ledford (5-5) at No. 1 Harrisburg Hickory Ridge (10-1)

No. 5 North Forsyth (6-4) at No. 4 Kannapolis A.L. Brown (8-2)

No. 6 Concord Cox Mill (7-4) at No. 3 Weddington (8-2)

No. 7 Waxhaw Marvin Ridge (6-5) at No. 2 Charlotte Catholic (9-1)

WEST

No. 8 Charlotte Berry Academy (4-6) at No. 1 Belmont South Point (10-0)

No. 5 Gastonia Ashbrook (6-4) at No. 4 Boiling Springs Crest (9-2)

No. 6 Asheville (6-4) at No. 3 Asheville Clyde Erwin (7-3)

No. 7 Enka (5-6) at No. 2 Statesville (10-1)

CLASS 3-A

EAST

No. 8 Currituck (3-7) at No. 1 Havelock (10-1)

No. 5 Jacksonville (7-4) at No. 4 Rocky Mount (8-2)

No. 6 West Craven (6-5) at No. 3 Washington (8-3)

No. 7 West Carteret (5-6) at No. 2 Hertford County (7-3)

MIDEAST

No. 8 South Brunswick (2-8) at No. 1 Eastern Alamance (10-1)

No. 5 Pikeville Charles B. Aycock (5-5) at No. 4 Burlington Williams (7-4)

No. 6 Southern Vance (5-5) at No. 3 South Johnston (7-3)

No. 7 Eastern Wayne (4-6) at No. 2 Orange (8-2)

MIDWEST

No. 8 Mayodan McMichael (4-6) at No. 1 Concord (9-2)

No. 5 Northeast Guilford (7-3) at No. 4 West Rowan (9-2)

No. 6 Central Cabarrus (8-3) at No. 3 Rockingham County (8-3)

No. 7 China Grove Jesse Carson (4-7) at No. 2 East Rowan (6-4)

WEST

No. 8 Gastonia Hunter Huss (5-6) at No. 1 East Henderson (10-1)

No. 5 Franklin (8-3) at No. 4 Morganton Freedom (9-2)

No. 6 Lenoir Hibriten (7-4) at No. 3 Hickory (7-4)

No. 7 Gastonia Forestview (7-4) at No. 2 Lawndale Burns (8-3)

CLASS 2-AA

EAST

No. 8 Newport Croatan (6-4) at No. 1 Jacksonville Northside (11-0)

No. 5 Hampstead Topsail (7-3) at No. 4 North Pitt (7-4)

No. 6 SouthWest Edgecombe (5-5) at No. 3 East Duplin (9-2)

No. 7 North Brunswick (6-5) at No. 2 Bunn (8-2)

MIDEAST

No. 8 Burlington Cummings (5-5) at No. 1 Carrboro (11-0)

No. 5 Randleman (7-4) at No. 4 Franklinton (9-2)

No. 6 Pittsboro Northwood (6-5) at No. 3 St. Pauls (8-3)

No. 7 Wendell Corinth-Holders (5-6) at No. 2 Reidsville (9-2)

MIDWEST

No. 8 Monroe Piedmont (5-6) at No. 1 High Point T.W. Andrews (9-1) (Thursday)

No. 5 North Surry (8-2) at No. 4 West Stokes (6-5)

No. 6 Central Davidson (6-5) at No. 3 Marshville Forest Hills (8-3)

No. 7 Waxhaw Cuthbertson (6-5) at No. 2 Salisbury (8-2)

WEST

No. 8 Ashe County (4-7) at No. 1 Newton-Conover (8-3)

No. 5 East Burke (5-6) at No. 4 Catawba Bandys (7-4)

No. 6 West Lincoln (5-6) at No. 3 South Iredell (9-2)

No. 7 Sylva Smoky Mountain (4-7) at No. 2 Canton Pisgah (5-6)

CLASS 2-A

EAST

No. 8 Wilson Beddingfield (4-6) at No. 1 Tarboro (10-0)

No. 5 Kill Devil Hills First Flight (6-4) at No. 4 Kinston (6-4)

No. 6 Bertie (6-5) at No. 3 Elizabeth City Northeastern (9-2)

No. 7 Louisburg (5-5) at No. 2 Edenton Holmes (10-0)

MIDEAST

No. 8 Whiteville (4-6) at No. 1 East Bladen (7-3)

No. 5 Climax Providence Grove (5-6) at No. 4 Eastern Randolph (7-4)

No. 6 Siler City Jordan-Matthews (5-6) at No. 3 South Granville (8-3)

No. 7 Clinton (5-6) at No. 2 South Columbus (9-2)

MIDWEST

No. 8 Trinity Wheatmore (5-6) at No. 1 East Lincoln (11-0)

No. 5 Winston-Salem Carver (5-5) at No. 4 Boonville Starmount (9-1)

No. 6 Thomasville (4-7) at No. 3 Maiden (8-2)

No. 7 Lincolnton (6-5) at No. 2 Wilkes Central (9-1)

WEST

No. 8 Burnsville Mountain Heritage (4-6) at No. 1 Madison (10-1)

No. 5 Black Mountain C.D. Owen (5-6) at No. 4 Valdese Draughn (5-6)

No. 6 East Rutherford (5-6) at No. 3 Polk County (8-3)

No. 7 Forest City Chase (5-6) at No. 2 Shelby (6-4)

CLASS 1-AA

EAST

No. 8 Camden (6-4) at No. 1 Southwest Onslow (9-1)

No. 5 Gates County (7-3) at No. 4 Ayden-Grifton (8-2)

No. 6 Holly Ridge Dixon (7-3) at No. 3 Goldsboro (9-1)

No. 7 Riverside-Martin (6-5) at No. 2 Northampton (9-2)

MIDEAST

No. 8 East Montgomery (4-7) at No. 1 Warsaw James Kenan (10-0) (Thursday)

No. 5 Salemburg Lakewood (7-3) at No. 4 Rose Hill Union (6-5)

No. 6 Pender (5-5) at No. 3 Wallace-Rose Hill (7-4)

No. 7 Dunn Midway (5-6) at No. 2 Red Springs (8-3)

MIDWEST

No. 8 Monroe Central Academy (2-9) at No. 1 Mount Airy (10-1)

No. 5 West Montgomery (6-5) at No. 4 North Rowan (8-3)

No. 6 East Surry (5-6) at No. 3 South Stokes (8-2)

No. 7 Kernersville Bishop McGuinness (5-6) at No. 2 Monroe (8-3)

WEST

No. 8 East Wilkes (2-8) at No. 1 Swain County (11-0)

No. 5 Cherryville (4-7) at No. 4 West Wilkes (4-6)

No. 6 Avery County (3-8) at No. 3 Lake Norman Charter (9-1)

No. 7 North Wilkes (3-8) at No. 2 Hendersonville (10-1)

CLASS 1-A

EAST

No. 8 Cape Hatteras (2-9) at No. 1 Plymouth (10-1)

No. 5 Chocowinity Southside (5-6) at No. 4 Creswell (6-5)

No. 6 Pinetown Northside (4-6) at No. 3 Manteo (9-1)

No. 7 Swan Quarter Mattamuskeet (3-7) at No. 2 Columbia (7-3)

MIDEAST

No. 8 Princeton (2-8) at No. 1 North Duplin (7-3)

No. 5 North Edgecombe (4-5) at No. 4 Weldon (4-6)

No. 6 Rosewood (3-7) at No. 3 Lejeune (5-6)

No. 7 Jones Senior (2-8) at No. 2 Southeast Halifax (7-4)

MIDWEST

No. 8 South Robeson (3-7) at No. 1 Albemarle (10-1)

No. 5 West Columbus (4-7) at No. 4 Monroe Union Academy (4-6)

No. 6 Chatham Central (4-7) at No. 3 South Stanly (8-3)

No. 7 North Stokes (4-7) at No. 2 East Columbus (7-4)

WEST

No. 8 Alleghany (3-7) at No. 1 Elkin (6-4)

No. 5 Rosman (5-6) at No. 4 Mooresboro Thomas Jefferson Classical (6-5)

No. 6 Hayesville (4-6) at No. 3 Robbinsville (8-3)

No. 7 Cherokee (3-7) at No. 2 Murphy (9-2)

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