Give Watauga High girls basketball coach Klay Anderson a lot of credit. He won't back down from a challenge, no matter what the odds may be. And Anderson, who has led the girls program the last six

years, has defied those odds at times. And he nearly did it again Tuesday night. The Pioneers (3-3), who only had eight players in uniform because of injury, nearly broke their 30-game losing streak against McDowell. But they came up short as the Titans (3-3), who snapped a two-game losing streak, rallied to win, 50-45 at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

"I really believe it in my heart that we were fatigue played a big part in McDowell's comeback," Anderson said. "Don't get me wrong, they made some big shots in the second half, and they also hit their free throws. But I really felt my girls gave everything they had, but we came up short."

The Pioneers, mired in a three-game losing streak, jumped out to a 16-5 first-quarter lead. Hannah Margolis, who had nine points in the opening stanza, sparked a 10-0 run to close out the period.

The Pioneers led by as many as 11 points on three different occasions. A three-pointer by Savanna Wood gave WHS a 31-20 lead early in the third quarter. But from that point on, the Titans took control.

A 12-0 run, sparked by Carly McRary, who came off the bench and scored eight points in the second half, gave the Titans a 32-31 lead heading into the final stanza. Markia Stacey's three pointer gave McDowell its first lead of the game with 11 seconds left in the third period.

"We had our chances," Anderson said. "We missed the front end of a one-and-one, we missed some open shots. We were right there. We gave ourselves a chance to win the game."

WHS took its final lead at 34-32 early in the fourth quarter by Wood. But the Titans gradually pulled away and built a five point advantage at 46-41 with 1:11 left to play. But a three ball by Margolis and a free throw by Danielle Welsh cut the lead down to one with less than a minute to play.

But Kassie Brackett made three of four free throws down the stretch to ice the game. Her two free throws with 11 seconds left gave McDowell a 49-45 lead. The Pioneers missed three of four free throws in the final minute of the game, including the front end of two one-and-one opportunities.

"We were right there," Anderson said. "Our girls gave it all they had. Unfortunately, when you do that and lose, it really hurts. Make no mistake about it, (McDowell) did a great job coming back to win the game. But we fought so hard. We have some time off, so we can rest our legs and regroup. I have a lot of confidence in this team."

Wood led WHS with 18 points, including five three pointers; Margolis had a double-double with 14 points and 13 rebounds. Kaelin McNeill pulled down ten boards; Welsh had eight points and six rebounds. Nikki Mills led McDowell with 15 points, including ten in the second half.

**NOTES:** McDowell won the JV game, 58-16. Sydney Jones led WHS (4-4) with six points....Injury-wise, Tasha Wilson will be out six to eight weeks with a broken fibula in her left leg. She was injuried during the second quarter of last Friday night's game at Avery. Jenna Woods is still out indefinitely with a knee injury, and Haleigh Wallace is back at practice doing

light workouts, and according to Anderson, if all goes well, they expect to have her back to next Thursday, December 20 when the Pioneers entertain West Caldwell.

**McDOWELL 50, WATAUGA 45**

| **SCORE BY PERIODS** | **1st** | **2nd** | **3rd** | **4th** | **TOTAL** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| McDOWELL | 5 | 11 | 16 | 18 - | 50 |
| WATAUGA | 16 | 8 | 7 | 14 - | 45 |

**McDOWELL:** NOBLITT 2, BLANTON 3, McRARY 8, N. MILLS 15, BRACKETT 7, STACEY 4, LENON 7, SMITH 4.
THREE-POINTERS: McRARY 2, STACEY.

**WHS:** WOOD 18 (8 REBOUNDS, 5 ASSISTS), MARGOLIS 14 (13 REBOUNDS, 5 ASSISTS, 2 BLOCKED SHOTS), HARRIS 3, WELSH 8 (6 REBOUNDS), FOUTS 2, McNEILL (10 REBOUNDS).
THREE-POINTERS: WOOD 5, MARGOLIS 2, HARRIS.

**TITANS OUTLAST WHS**

Watauga High boys basketball coach Rob Sanders is pleased with what he's seen, so far. The Pioneers (4-2) have won four out of six to start the season with their only two losses coming against McDowell.

The Titans (6-1) victimized WHS for the second time in a week, 68-63, in a non-conference game at Lentz-Eggers Gym Tuesday night. But despite the loss, Sanders was pretty upbeat following the game.

"I really like where we are right now," he said. "We played McDowell in a playoff-type game tonight. We came up short, but we held our own. We showed them something different tonight, and I felt our defense was pretty effective."

The Pioneers came out in a zone to start the game, and they opened up an early 9-0 lead. But McDowell came charging back on a 12-2 run of its own to go up 12-11 with 11 seconds left in the opening period. A three ball by Ben Margolis, who missed the Avery game with the flu, at the horn allowed WHS to regain the lead at 14-12.

"We opened up in a zone, but we had to come out of it when they started hitting shots," Sanders said. "They have a very good shooting team, and they don't take a lot of bad shots. They really challenged us tonight, but I felt we responded to that challenge. But they hit some big shots at the end and we didn't."

Senior Dylan Ricketts, who battled numerous injuries last season, gave McDowell a huge lift off the bench. He finished with a game-high 20 points, including four trifectas. His three ball just before halftime gave the Titans a 32-28 lead at the intermission.

The Titans carried that momentum into the third quarter. Josh Pyatt had the hot hand in the period as he scored ten of his 14 points in the stanza. That outburst also handed McDowell it's largest lead at 44-34.

But the Pioneers kept chipping away and got within seven after three, and thanks to a three-pointer by Margolis, his second trey of the game, the Pioneers narrowed the gap to one at 62-61 with less than a minute to play.

But the Titans iced the game away at the free-throw line. Raekwon Miller, Ricketts and Johnny Cooper made five of six free throws down the stretch to settle the issue.

Trailing 66-63 with 22 seconds left, Margolis fired a three from the top of the key, but it was off the mark. Ricketts, who was fouled on the play, buried two free throws to put it out of reach.

"We put Jay (Harrill) in there as a second option," Sanders said. "But Ben had a good look, and no his shot at the end didn't cost us the game. We just lost to a very good basketball team.

"And I really feel better about the two McDowell losses that the four wins we've had. That may sound crazy. But these two McDowell games have tested us, and those are the moments you learn the most from."

Cameron Baker led the Pioneers with 13 points; DeWayne Mackey, who got into early foul trouble, finished with ten points (all in the second half); Allen Koppenhaver, Tyler Sturgill and Collin Augustine, who fouled out with 1:20 left in the game, each had eight points apiece.

The Pioneers will take some time off before the boys and girls travel to Newton to play Fred T. Foard next Tuesday, December 18. Coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

**NOTES:** McDowell won the JV game, 56-51. Utah Jones led WHS (6-2) with 19 points. It's the first time the JV team has lost at the new Lentz-Eggers Gym. McDowell also broke WHS' 30-game winning streak in Marion on December 4.....Head coach Rob Sanders hopes to have Trevor Eggers back for the Fred T. Foard game next Tuesday, December 18. Eggers has been recovering from knee surgery.

**McDOWELL 68, WATAUGA 63**

| **SCORE BY PERIODS** | **1st** | **2nd** | **3rd** | **4th** | **TOTAL** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| McDOWELL | 12 | 20 | 22 | 16 - | 68 |
| WATAUGA | 14 | 14 | 17 | 18 - | 63 |

**McDOWELL:** RODRIGUEZ 10, CORPENING 4, RICKETTS 20, MILLER 11, COOPER 1, SPEROS 6, HELMS 2, PYATT 14.
THREE-POINTERS: RODRIGUEZ 2, RICKETTS 4, MILLER 2, PYATT.

**WHS:** HARRILL 3, STURGILL 8, AUGUSTINE 8, MARGOLIS 6, KOPPENHAVER 8, BAKER 13, HOWSER 7, MACKEY 10.
THREE-POINTERS: MARGOLIS 2, BAKER 3.

**Photo Courtesy: Hannah Margolis, Rob Moore**