The Watauga High boys basketball team shook off the effects of its 13-day layoff by blasting North Surry 75-50 Thursday afternoon in the opening-round of the Alleghany Christmas Tournament in Sparta, N.C. Cameron Baker led three players in double figures with a season-high 24 points; Ben Margolis chipped in with 16 points, including four trifectas in the third quarter.

It was WHS' first game since December 14. The Pioneers had both of their games with Fred T. Foard (December 18) and West Caldwell (December 20) postponed last week following the sudden passing of teacher and coach Leigh Wallace. The Fred T. Foard game will be made up on Thursday, January 17.

"There are things way more important than basketball," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "We're still in shock with Leigh's passing, and our prayers go out to the Cooper-Wallace family. We showed some signs of the layoff. Our timing was off, and we were out of sync at times. But I was real pleased with our defensive intensity. We forced the issue and took control of the game."

The Pioneers (5-2) also silenced North Surry's (4-7) best player, Grayson Vernon. And the Pioneers did it with their best offensive run of the season in the second quarter. A 21-point run turned a 14-9 deficit late in the first quarter into a 30-14 lead at the 4:24 mark of the first half. But the Greyhounds chipped their way back into it, thanks to point guard Klay Newsome, who scored ten of his 12 points in the final three minutes of the second quarter.

His layup with 2:49 left in the period snapped WHS' run, and his offensive outburst got the Greyhounds within nine at the break. North Surry kept chipping way and got the lead down to six at 38-32 early in the third quarter. But Margolis took over from there as he discovered his scoring touch and ignited a 21-7 run by the Pioneers to close out the stanza. WHS led 59-39 after three and cruised home from there.

"It's nice to see Ben get his shooting touch back, especially after we didn't play or practice much in the last two weeks," Sanders said. "But Ben has the ability to hit from long range. They left him open a few times today, and our guys were able to find him. And we really needed that lift after (Newsome) brought them back with that barrage in the second quarter."

WHS eventually built its lead to 24 points at 68-42 with just over four minutes left to play; the lead grew to a game-high 27 points with less than two minutes to go. Baker added 12 rebounds, five steals and three assists to his explosive afternoon; DeWayne Mackey had eight points, four assists and six rebounds; Ben Howser had ten points and four steals; Allen Koppenhaver had eight points. The Pioneers outrebounded North Surry 36-16. The Greyhounds turned it over 29 times.

Vernon led the Greyhounds with 19 points; Marcus Sawyer of the Greyhounds finished with eight points.

"Vernon is a great player," Sanders said. "We stressed to our guys that we wanted to step things up and put some distance between ourselves and this team. They're a scrappy bunch. They came back on us, but we never let Vernon decide anything. We were able to put the game away with our speed and size in the second half."

The Pioneers were scheduled to play the Raleigh Heat (13-2), a Class 1A home-school team,

Friday at 4:30 p.m., in a second-round game. But that game was cancelled when the Heat made plans to play in the City of Durham Holiday Tournament. The Pioneers won't play again until Friday, January 4, when they entertain Hickory as part of a boys and girls double-header at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

WATAUGA 75, NORTH SURRY 50

SCORE BY PERIODS	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**TOTAL**
WATAUGA	11	24	24	16 -	75
NORTH SURRY	14	12	13	11 -	50

WHS: STURGILL 3, MARGOLIS 16, KOPPENHAVER 8, BAKER 24 (12 REBOUNDS, 5 STEALS, 3 ASSISTS), HOWSER 10 (4 STEALS), MACKEY 8 (4 ASSISTS, 6 REBOUNDS), LAMBERT 6. FG: 25, 3FG: 6, FT: 7-15.
THREE-POINTERS: MARGOLIS 4, BAKER, HOWSER.

NORTH SURRY: NEWSOME 12, HANDY 4, HOBGIN 1, VERNON 19, SAWYER 8, MARCH 2, FLETCHER 2, WILSON 2. FG: 7, 3FG: 7, FT: 15-21.
THREE-POINTERS: VERNON 3, NEWSOME 2, SAWYER 2.

Pioneers Drop Fourth Straight

Things aren't going very well for head coach Klay Anderson and the Watuaga High girls basketball team these days. The Pioneers, who have three key players (Jenna Woods out with a leg injury, Haleigh Wallace out with a stress fracture in her right leg, and Tasha Wilson out with a broken leg) on the shelf with possible season-ending injuries, continue to struggle.
The Pioneers (3-4) suffered their fourth consecutive loss Thursday afternoon in the opening round of the Alleghany Christmas Tournament in Sparta, N.C. WHS, which rallied from eight points down to take a two point halftime lead, dropped a 56-43 decision to North Surry. Clare Harris, who came off the bench and led WHS with 15 points, fueled a 15-3 run in the second quarter that turned an 18-10 deficit into a 25-21 lead with 21 seconds left in the first half. Harris led all scorers with 11 points, including three three pointers, at the break.
"The layoff hurt us some, but I thought we played three good quarters of basketball today," Anderson said. "I really thought the game turned in their favor in the fourth quarter. We got stuck on (34) and they put a run together and finally put some distance between us."
Malaya Johnson did most of the damage as she scored ten of her 17 points in the second half. Kristina Rumplasch led the Greyhounds (9-1), who are 3-0 lifetime against WHS, with 18 points.

"But they also hurt us with some backdoor plays as well," Anderson said. "It wasn't just Johnson and Kristina. They got other people involved in the second half and attacked the basket."
The Greyhounds, riding an eight-game winning streak, eventually built a 12-point lead at 48-36. The Pioneers battled back and got within 48-41 on a three ball by Savanna Wood with 1:41 to play, but WHS never got any closer as the Greyhounds iced the game away by making six of eight free throws down the stretch. The Greyhounds were 14-22 for the game.
"Clare just stopped scoring in the second half, and that hurt us a bit," Anderson said. "She's an excellent shooter, but she must be more aggressive with the basketball. She needs to attack the basket more. Our scoring must come from Savanna, Clare and Hannah (Margolis). But we win as a team, and we lose as a team. It's frustrating, but all we can do is to keep working."
Wood finished with 11 points, including a pair of threes; Hannah Margolis finished with seven points---all on free throws. The Pioneers will play Alleghany Friday at 4:30 p.m. The game was moved up from 6 p.m., when the WHS boys had their game with the Raleigh Heat cancelled. Coverage begins at 4:10 p.m. on AM 1450, WATA.

NORTH SURRY 56, WATAUGA 43

SCORE BY PERIODS	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**TOTAL**
WATAUGA	8	17	9	9	- 43
NORTH SURRY	16	7	15	18	- 56

WHS: WOOD 11, MARGOLIS 7, HARRIS 15, McNEILL 2, WELSH 6, LOFLIN 2. FG: 10, 3FG: 5, FT: 8-12.
THREE-POINTERS: HARRIS 3, WOOD 2.

NORTH SURRY: MADISON HAWKS 5, MORGAN HAWKS 4, BADGETT 6, MARCH 6, RUMPLASCH 18, JOHNSON 17, FG: 18, 3FG: 2, FT: 14-22.
THREE-POINTERS: RUMPLASCH 2.

Photo Courtesy: Cameron Baker, WHS Athletics