The Watauga High boys basketball team nearly pulled off its second win in three years at home against Northwestern 3A//4A Conference powerhouse, Hickory. Unfortunately, WHS' (5-3 overall; 0-1 NW3A/4A) upset bid came up short in a

74-72 overtime loss at Lentz-Eggers Gym Friday night in the conference opener for both teams. Josh Linebarger's floater in the lane with 5.6 seconds left in the first overtime period proved to be the game winner. Ben Margolis, who gave the Pioneers a lift with seven points in the fourth quarter, came up short on his three-point attempt as time ran out.

"We believed in ourselves," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "Our guys really felt they could play with Hickory, and we all thought we had an honest shot to win this game. We came up short, but we sent a message to the rest of the conference."

The Pioneers, who trailed the majority of the first half, wiped out an 11-point deficit with a 13-1 run that gave them a 36-34 lead with 21 seconds left in the second quarter. But a pair of free throws by DeAngelo Beatty forged a 36-36 tie at halftime.

The game went back-and-forth from there. WHS led 48-46 after three, but the Red Tornadoes (10-2; 1-0), led by former WHS Athletics Director and former Appalachian State University assistant basketball coach Lavell Hall, came back to take a 64-58 lead with less than a minute to play. But the Pioneers rallied.

A field goal by Ben Howser, who eventually fouled out, and a three by Ben Margolis, got WHS within one; Magolis sank a jump shot from the short corner moments later that gave the Pioneers a one-pont lead at 65-64. But Linebarger's free throw attempt with 2.2 seconds left forced overtime.

"Ben is really down on himself for missing that last shot," Sanders said. "He found his groove at Alleghany (Christmas tournament) last week. He's a good shooter, and he got us back in the game by hitting some big shots in the fourth quarter. It was a great game. We came up short, but I thought our guys gave it all they had."

WHS got off to a quick start by scoring the first five points in the overtime period for a 70-65 lead. But the Red Tornadoes chipped away and eventually took a 71-70 lead on a bucket by Devonte Fuller. A free throw by Raheim Connelly gave the Red Tornadoes a two-point lead with 21 seconds left, but Cameron Baker tied it up moments later with a layup in traffic.

That set the stage for Linebager's game-winning heroics. Linebarger picked off a long rebound on a missed shot by Connelly from the far corner and buried the game winner.

"We knew coming in that Watauga was going to be a scrappy team," said Hall, who was the AD when Sanders was named the boys basketball coach at WHS. "Rob always has them playing hard, and they really played hard tonight. We didn't play that well tonight, but I'm sure Watuaga had a lot to do with that."

Darius Malbon paced the Red Tornadoes, who were state finalists in Class 3A last season, with a game-high 25 points. Connelly, who buried three trifectas in the first quarter, finished with 15 points; Zach Jarrett, who was plagued by foul trouble all night, finished with 14 points. The Red Tornadoes buried 12 three pointers, six of those by Malbon and four by Connelly, and they were 24-36 at the foul line.

In turn, the Pioneers were 13-14 at the line. DeWayne Mackey paced WHS with 17 points. The

Pioneers had four players in double figures. Howser and Allen Koppenhaver finished with 13 points apeice; Baker had 12.
"It's a tough loss, but this game gives us momentum going on that long road trip," Sanders said. "It's the teeth of our schedule, and we're going to play in some hostile buildings. But we can really build on a game like this. Hickory is a great team, and we really challenged them tonight."
NOTES: The Red Tornaodes were playing without Gavin Huffman and C.J. Wardrick, who were home battling the flu....The Pioneers embark on a six-game, ten-day road trip beginning Tuesday night at Wilkes Central. That's WHS' longest road trip since a five-game road trip to open the season in 1997-98.....The Pioneers next home game will be Tuesday, January 22 when St. Stephens comes to town.....Collin Augustine missed his second consecutive game with a foot injury. Augustine has been plagued by injuries this season. He missed the first five games of the season with a broken hand.

HICKORY 74, WATAUGA 72 (OT)

SCORE BY PERIOD	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**1OT**	**TOTAL**
HICKORY	24	12	10	19	9	74
WATAUGA	14	22	12	17	7	72

HHS: LINEBARGER 4, JARRETT 14, BEATTY 4, CONNELLY 15, FULLER 9, WASHINGTON 1, MALBON 25, PETTY 2. FG: 7, 3FG: 12, FT: 24-36.
THREE-POINTERS: MALBON 6, CONNELLY 4, JARRETT 2.

WHS: STURGILL 2, GAILES 2 (5 ASSISTS), MARGOLIS 7, KOPPENHAVER 13 (7 REBOUNDS), BAKER 12 (7 REBOUNDS), HOWSER 13 (8 REBOUNDS, 3 STEALS, 5 ASSISTS), MACKEY 17, LAMBERT 6. FG: 22, 3FG: 5, FT: 13-14.
THREE-POINTERS: MACKEY 3, MARGOLIS, HOWSER.

RED TORNADOES RIP PIONEERS

The Hickory High girls basketball team lived up to its pre-season hype by clobbering Watauga 81-38 Friday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym in the Northwestern 3A/4A opener for both teams. The Pioneers (4-5 overall; 0-1 NW3A/4A) were actually in the game, trailing 18-13 midway through the second quarter, before the bottom dropped out.
The Red Tornadoes (12-0; 1-0), who have won 28 consecutive league games, ripped off a 14-0 run and took a commanding 32-13 lead. And for WHS, it was all downhill from there.
The Red Tornadoes led by as many as 22 points in the second quarter, the lead grew to 35 points in the third period, and Hickory eventually led by as many as 46 points in the fourth quarter.
"We just lost our edge," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "Two things really hurt us tonight. The 14-point run and Hannah (Margolis) picking up her third foul. That really took away her aggressiveness on the floor. We weren't scoring that well, but we were playing decent defense. But when Hannah got into foul trouble, all that changed. We're a different team when she's not running the show."
The Red Tornadoes had three players in double figures. Yazman Hannah led Hickory with a game-high 23 points; Danasia Witherspoon finished with 18 points; point guard Farrah Young tossed in 18 as well. Margolis led WHS with 12 points and ten rebounds. Savanna Wood had 11 points; Ryan Loflin, who was promoted from the JV team during the Christmas break, poured in a career-high eight points with six rebounds and three steals. Kaelin McNeill had four points and six boards.
NOTES: Hickory defeated WHS 37-25 in the girls JV game. Brooklin Carroll led WHS with seven points; Madi Brown had six....The WHS JV boys defeated Hickory 58-46 in their conference opener. WHS led 21-7 after the first quarter, and 35-19 at halftime. Utah Jones paced WHS with 19 points, Aaron Dobbins had 10 points and 14 rebounds, T.J. Poulos had eight points, nine assists and three steals.

HICKORY 81, WATAUGA 38

SCORE BY PERIOD	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**TOTAL**
HICKORY	16	23	22	20 -	81
WATAUGA	9	11	7	11 -	38

HHS: YOUNG 18, LINDER 2, HANNAH 23, WITHERSPOON 18, WRIGHT 2, GAITHER 2, TROUTMAN 4, CAMERON 2, MILLER 8, PASPA 2. FG: 26, 3FG: 4, FT: 17-25.
THREE-POINTERS: YOUNG 2, HANNAH 2.

WHS: WOOD 11, MARGOLIS 12 (10 REBOUNDS, 2 ASSISTS), HARRIS 1, McNEILL 4 (6 REBOUNDS, 1 BLOCKED SHOT), LOFLIN 8 (6 REBOUNDS, 3 STEALS), WELSH 2. FG: 7, 3FG: 5, FT: 9-12.
THREE-POINTERS: WOOD 3, MARGOLIS 2.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

FRIDAY'S GAMES

GIRLS:
HICKORY 81, WATAUGA 38
SOUTH CALDWELL 46, ST. STEPHENS 37
FRED T. FOARD 54, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 45
WEST WILKES 45, HIBRITEN 49

BOYS:
HICKORY 74, WATAUGA 72 (OT)
SOUTH CALDWELL 55, ST. STEPHENS 54
FRED T. FOARD 61, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 45
HIBRITEN 63, WEST WILKES 40

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS

GIRLS:

SOUTH CALDWELL 2-0; 5-5
HICKORY 1-0; 12-0
FRED T. FOARD 1-0; 8-5
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 1-1; 12-2
WATAUGA 0-1; 4-5
HIBRITEN 0-1; 4-8
ST. STEPHENS 0-2; 2-10

BOYS:

SOUTH CALDWELL 2-0; 4-6
FRED T. FOARD 1-0; 11-2
HICKORY 1-0; 10-2
ST. STEPHENS 1-1; 10-3
WATAUGA 0-1; 5-3
HIBRITEN 0-1; 7-5
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 0-2; 7-7

TUESDAY'S GAME

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