Watauga High girls basketball coach Klay Anderson knows all too well just how dangerous Hickory can be. He's seen it many times before. A close game in the blink of an eye can turn into a blowout. And that's just what happened Tuesday

night at Craft Gymnasium as the Red Tornadoes blasted WHS, 64-37. The Pioneers (7-9 overall; 2-4 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) gave it their best shot to keep the game close. A three pointer by Savanna Wood and a field goal by Hannah Margolis capped off an 8-3 run and narrowed a 12-point lead down to six at 29-23 with 2:35 left in the first half. And then it all fell apart.

The Red Tornadoes (17-1; 6-1) put together a ten-point run to close out the half, and built a 16-point lead at the break. That also outburst turned out to be the knockout blow.

"We were playing so well," Anderson said. "Our game plan was to force (Danasia) Witherspoon to shoot from the baseline. She is strong inside. That's where she gets a lot of her points. And she made a couple of outside shots, but she also missed a few in a row. That allowed us to stay in contention. But that run in the final minute of the first half really killed us."

Hickory's one-two punch, Witherspoon and Yazmen Hannah, combined for 39 points in the assault. Hannah had a game-high 23 points; Witherspoon had 16 points. The Red Tornadoes finally put the Pioneers out of their misery in the third quarter. WHS made 11 turnovers in the period and only scored four points. Meanwhile, the Red Tornadoes gradually pulled away and built a 25-point advantage after three. The lead grew to 28 points at 55-27 early in the fourth quarter on a three ball by Alex Wright.

The Red Tornaddoes also maintained their grip on first place in the NW3A/4A standings. Fred T. Foard, who the Pioneers play tonight, moved within a half-game of the lead by beating Alexander Central 59-50 Tuesday night in Newton, N.C. The Tigers also swept the season series against the Cougars with that win.

The loss drops WHS into sixth place, one-half game behind Hibriten and South Caldwell (both teams are 3-4 in league play) for fourth place and home-court advantage in the opening round of the conference tournament (which begins Monday, February 18).

"If we can win one of these next five upcoming games in the next week, we should have a good shot at finishing fourth," Anderson said. "And our girls feel they have a good shot at beating Fred T. Foard (tonight). We've had some close games with them in recent years. I'm confident my girls are ready to bounce back from this loss."

Wood, who carried WHS with 11 points in the first half, finished with 13 points. Margolis and Caitlin Wesphal each had five points apiece. The Pioneers, who have dropped two in a row, are 4-4 against the Tigers since they became conference members in 2009-10. Coverage from Newton tonight begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Hickory beat the WHS JV girls, 34-17. Madi Brown had nine points; Brooklin Carroll had four points.

HICKORY 64, WATAUGA 37

Score By Periods	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**Total**
Watauga	11	12	4	13	37
Hickory	19	20	13	12	64

WHS: WOOD 13, DERRICK 2, WESPHAL 5, MARGOLIS 5 (7 REBOUNDS, 3 BLOCKED SHOTS, 3 STEALS), HARRIS 3, McNEILL 2 (7 REBOUNDS), MAKAROVA 1, LOFLIN 4, WELSH 2. FG: 10, 3FG: 5, FT: 2-4.
THREE-POINTERS: WOOD 3, HARRIS, WESPHAL.

HICKORY: LINDER 2, WITHERSPOON 16, HANNAH 23, WRIGHT 9, GAITHER 2, TROUTMAN 12. FG: 21, 3FG: 5, 7-11.
THREE-POINTERS: WRIGHT 3, TROUTMAN 2.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

TUESDAY'S GAMES
GIRLS:
HICKORY 64, WATAUGA 37
FRED T. FOARD 59, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 50
SOUTH CALDWELL 50. ST. STEPHENS 45
HIBRITEN - BYE

BOYS:
HICKORY 75, WATAUGA 56
FRED T. FOARD 49, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 41
ST. STEPHENS 75, SOUTH CALDWELL 69
HIBRITEN - BYE

MONDAY'S GAMES
GIRLS:
HIBRITEN 37, SOUTH CALDWELL 33

BOYS:

SOUTH CALDWELL 70, HIBRITEN 55

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES
WATAUGA @ FRED T. FOARD
ST. STEPHENS @ ALEXANDER CENTRAL
WILKES CENTRAL @ SOUTH CALDWELL