Written by Mike Kelly
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For a team that didn't practiced for five days because of the wintry weather that invaded the High Country last last week, the Watauga High boys basketball

team looked pretty good, especially in the first half.
An 18-point run in the second quarter gave WHS (10-7 overall; 4-4 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) a 21-point halftime lead as the Pioneers defeated Alexander Central 58-41 at Lentz-Eggers Gym. The win also keeps WHS in a fourth-place tie with South Caldwell (which is 5-5 in conference play) for home-court advantage in the opening-round of the conference tournament, which begins Monday, Febuary 18.
The Spartans kept pace as they knocked off Hickory 54-52 Tuesday night. Jordyn Probst tipped in the game-winning shot with a little less than three seconds left in the game.
"It's going to go down to the wire in this conference," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "There's no sure thing. Every night, someone can beat you. But I was happy the way we came out tonight. For not practicing the last five days, we looked pretty sharp in the first half."
But the Pioneers were a completely different team in the second half, especially in the third quarter. Leading 40-19 at the intermission, the Pioneers scored a season-low three points in the third quarter. Tyler Sturgill finally snapped WHS' scoring drought with a free throw with 2:31 left in the period. Meanwhile, the Cougars (7-15; 0-10), mired in a nine-game losing streak (they haven't won a game since the Catawba Christmas Classic in late December) chipped away and got the lead down to ten points on a three ball by Luke Watts with 2:11 left in the third quarter. But Sturgill hit a bucket with 16 seconds left in the period, and that seemed to jump-start the Pioneers. WHS went on a 9-0 run from there, built its lead back to 19 points and coasted home from there. A bucket by Matt Lambert with 5:13 left gave WHS a 50-31 lead.
"The effects of not practicing for five days really caught up to us in the third quarter," Sanders said. "That third quarter was ugly. We looked tired, fatiqued, and we got complacent. But Tyler really gave us a lift, and he's been doing that all year for us coming off the bench. That bucket he hit late in the third quarter got us going again."
Sturgill finished with five points. Cameron Baker paced the Pioneers with 15 points, 12 of those in the first half, six steals, six assists and seven rebounds. DeWayne Mackey was the only other player in double figures for WHS with 11 points, including three trifectas. Ben Howser had nine and eight rebounds, and Eli Gailes had six steals.
Ty Ireland led the Cougars with 11 points. Watts had six points. The Pioneers take on Fred T. Foard in a rescheduled game tonight at Lentz-Eggers Gym. The Tigers come to town sitting in first place in the NW3A/4A standings. The Tigers took sole possession of the top spot Tuesday night as they defeated Hibriten in Lenior. Coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.
NOTES: The WHS JV boys defeated Alexander Central 57-31. Aaron Dobbins had 11 points, seven rebounds and six assists; Utah Jones had a game-high 16 points and four assists.

WATAUGA 58, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 41

Score By Periods	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**Total**
Alexander Central	14	5	12	10	41
Watauga	22	18	3	15	58

ACHS: BEAN 2, R. MILLER 2, IRELAND 11, SMITH 2, BOWMAN 3, QUIGLEY 5, WATTS 6, WALL 4, STARNES 6. FG: 9, 3FG: 4, FT: 11-15.
THREE-POINTERS: WATTS 2, IRELAND, WALL.

WHS: STEURY 3, STURGILL 5, GAILES 1 (6 STEALS), AUGUSTINE 6, MARGOLIS 6, BAKER 15 (6 STEALS, 6 ASSISTS, 7 REBOUNDS), HOWSER 9, MACKEY 11, LAMBERT 2. FG: 13, 3FG: 8, FT: 8-16.
THREE-POINTERS: MACKEY 3, MARGOLIS 2, BAKER, HOWSER, STEURY.