Written by Mike Kelly
Tuesday, 19 February 2013 09:10

The Watauga High girls basketball team defeated Hibriten Monday night 56-50 in the opening-round of the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference Tournament at Lentz-Eggers Gym. The Pioneers (11-12 overall), riding a season-high, four-game

winning streak, jumped on top for good with an 18-point barrage in the second quarter. Senior Savanna Wood and sophomore Clare Harris backboned the assault as those two combined for six three pointers in the period. A three ball by Wood tied the game at 11-11; a three ball by Harris moments later put WHS on top to stay. That outbursted also ignited a 12-point run that gave WHS a 26-20 halftime lead.

"We shot the lights out in the second quarter," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "Savanna and Clare were on fire. Our outside shooting opened up their zone. The only concern you have when you shoot it that well is that you leave yourself vunerable if those shots don't fall in the second half. But we did we do, we attacked the basket and got the free throw line in the second half. And we protected our lead. We needed our best to advance and survive, and we turned in a strong effort tonight."

Harris buried five threes and finished with a team-high, and a career-best 19 points. Wood and Hannah Margolis each had 13 points apiece. WHS made eight three pointers in the game. The Pioneers also survived a 26-point onslaught by Keisha Corpening of the Panthers.

"She is such a tremendous shooter, and a great player," Anderson said. "We had a hand in her face, and a couple of times we had two girls on her, and she still made the shot. She was still hobbled by an ankle injury (she did not play against WHS on February 12), and it took away her dribble drive ability. But she was a huge weapon for them outside, and she did a great job finding the open player when we collasped on her. But we didn't panic when the game got close at the end. We made a couple of big stops on defense, and we made our free throws down the stretch. And those are things you have to do to win the close games."

The Pioneers eventually stretched their lead to 15 points at 39-24 in the third quarter. But trailing 43-33 to start the final period, the Panthers (8-16) chipped way and cut the lead to two at 49-47 with 2:51 left. But the Pioneers made some big stops on defense to preserve the lead, and Harris scored a huge insurance basket with 26 seconds left on a backdoor feed from Margolis on an out of bounds play.

"Those two points were big," Anderson said. "That play has worked for us all year. We were very aggressive on defense tonight. And when you're not aggressive on defense, you allow the other team to get comfortable on offense. And it doesn't matter what sport you're playing. If the offense is comfortable, they have a much greater chance to suceed. We made some big stops. The jump ball by Tori(Derrick) was huge, Clare deflected a shot, and Kaelin (McNeill) came up with some big defensive rebounds. Good defense creates easy offense, and we were able to convert some easy baskets out of that."

Following a time out, Corpening, who fouled out with three seconds left, buried a three with 11.5 seconds left cutting the lead to two at 52-20. But four consecutive free throws down the stretch by Wood and Margolis sealed the deal for WHS. The Pioneers made 9-11 free throws in the fourth quarter. The win vaults WHS into the semifinal round against Hickory, the No.1 seed, Wednesday night at Craft Gymnasium. The Red Tornadoes (22-2), who shared a

tri-championship in the regular season with Fred T. Foard and Alexander Central, won the draw and received a first-round bye.
"They're the No.2 seed and they deserve it, but we're playing with a lot of confidence right now," Anderson said. "And at this time of the year, you decide the games on the floor. It's all about survive and advance. They've beaten us twice this season, but (Hickory coach) Barbara Helms has to convince her team that we're going to be a real test for them. We have to handle their pressure, and we can't have any letdowns. I like what we're doing right now, and I'm excited about Wednesday night."
The Pioneers take on Hickory in the first semifinal game Wednesday night at 6:30 p.m. Coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM. Wednesday's second semifinal game finds Fred T. Foard taking on Alexander Central at 8 p.m. The Tigers advanced Monday night by knocking off St. Stephens, 54-34; the Cougars advanced by eliminating South Caldwell 76-47 in the opening round. The girls championship game will be played Friday night at 6:30 p.m.
NOTES: Danielle Welsh did not play Monday night. Welsh injuried her knee at St. Stephens last Friday night in the regular-season finale. According to head coach Klay Anderson, depending on the severity of the injury, Welsh will definitely not play at all this week.....The WHS girls also hosted their first Nw3A/4A Tournament game.

WATAUGA 56, HIBRITEN 50

Score By Period	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**Total**
Hibriten	11	9	13	17	50
Watauga	8	18	17	13	56

HIBRITEN: McCRARY 4, LOGAN 2, SOLDATI 4, CORPENING 26, GREENE 2, B.MORTON 4, C.MORTON 8. FG: 16, 3FG: 5, FT: 3-6.
THREE-POINTERS: CORPENING 3, C.MORTON 2.

WHS: WOOD 13, DERRICK 2, MARGOLIS 13, HARRIS 19, McNEILL 4, WILSON 5. FG: 10, 3FG: 8, FT: 12-16.
THREE-POINTERS: HARRIS 5, WOOD 3.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

MONDAY'S GAMES

GIRLS:

WATUAGA 56, HIBRITEN 50

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 76, SOUTH CALDWELL 47

FRED T. FOARD 54, ST. STEPHENS 34

WEDNESDAY'S SEMIFINAL GAMES

CRAFT GYMNASIUM (HICKORY)

WATAUGA v. HICKORY, 6:30 P.M.

FRED T. FOARD v. ALEXANDER CENTRAL 8 P.M.

BOYS:

MONDAY'S GAMES

WATAUGA 67, SOUTH CALDWELL 56

ST. STEPHENS 77, HIBRITEN 57

HICKORY 59, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 46

TUESDAY'S SEMIFINAL GAMES

CRAFT GYMNASIUM (HICKORY)

WATAUGA v. FRED T. FOARD, 6:30 P.M.

HICKORY v. ST. STEPHENS, 8 P.M.