Written by Mike Kelly
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Watauga High sophomore Clare Harris has the presicion of a sniper. She takes aim on her target and the results are fatal for the opposition. And that was definitely the case Monday night as Harris, who

actually began the day with a stiff neck, poured in a career-high 22 points as the Pioneers belted East Gaston 59-45 in the opening round of the North Carolina High School Association Class 4A State Playoffs at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

It was WHS' (12-13) first playoff win in three years (they defeated East Gaston in Mount Holly in 2009-10), snapping a two-game slide in post-season play.

"Clare almost didn't get to play tonight," said WHS coach Klay Anderson with a chuckle. "She woke up with a stiff neck, and she couldn't turn her head from left to right. The doctor cleared her and (WHS trainer) Cindy (Lentz) really worked on her before the game. Clare was in tears in the training room, but she was a shooting machine once she hit the floor."

Harris errupted for 14 points in the first half, and she buried a team-high four trifectas along the way. Her three ball with ten seconds left in the second quarter gave WHS a 29-27 lead at the break and WHS, which rallied from a nine-point deficit midway through the second quarter, never trailed again.

The win moves WHS into a second-round game at North Mecklenburg, the No.1 seed in the West, Wednesday night. North Meck defeated Lake Norman 62-43 Monday night at home.

"And we're going into that game as huge underdogs," Anderson said. "And that's the way I like it. Nobody knows who we are, and what we're capable of. This is a lot of fun. The girls are enjoying themselves, and we're playing some of our best basketball of the season right now."

The Pioneers are 5-1 in their last six games. The Pioneers eventually pulled away in the third quarter. Leading 31-29, WHS went on a 9-2 run and built a 40-31 lead after three. A three ball by junior Savanna Wood at the horn closed out the run with an exclamation point. Six East Gaston turnovers in the period aided WHS' cause.

It also sent the Warriors (8-18) reeling. WHS gradually pulled away and led by as many as 17 points on a pair of free throws by Wood with 1:19 left to play.

"We talked before the game that its down to a six game season," Anderson said. "And it takes one loss and you're gone. And that loss didn't come tonight. It was back and forth in the first half, but we flexed our muscles in the second half and pulled away. We finished strong."

Wood finished with 16 points, Hannah Margolis had six points, 12 rebounds, 11 assists and two blocks; Kaelin McNeill had six points and six rebounds, Ryan Loflin had seven points and six boards. Sa'Mauria Shannon led the Warriors with 13 points.

NOTES: Danielle Welsh, who suffered a knee injury in the regular-season finale at St. Stephens on February 15, did not play Monday night. She was at the game with a brace on her right knee. Her status for the remainder of the state playoffs is up in the air.....The Pioneers advanced to the second round of the state playoffs for the first time in three years.

WATAUGA 59, EAST GASTON 45

Score By Periods	**1st**	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**Total**
East Gaston	12	15	4	14 -	45
Watauga	11	18	11	19 -	59

EGHS: BREAKFIELD 2, NOBLITT 6, BROOKS 6, SHANNON 13, HOVIS 10, KLUTZZ 6. FG: 14, 3FG: 3, FT: 8-10.

THREE-POINTERS: NOBLITT 2, SHANNON.

WHS: WOOD 16, DERRICK 2 (6 REBOUNDS, 3 STEALS), MARGOLIS 6 (12 REBOUNDS, 11 ASSISTS, 2 BLOCKED SHOTS), HARRIS 22, McNEILL 6 (6 REBOUNDS), LOFLIN 7 (6 REBOUNDS). FG: 15, 3FG: 6, FT: 11-17.

THREE-POINTERS: HARRIS 4, WOOD 2.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE
MONDAY'S GAMES
GIRLS
WATAUGA 59, EAST GASTON 45
HICKORY 78, ASHBROOK 53
R.S. CENTRAL 68, FRED T. FOARD 58
CREST 50, HIBRITEN 48
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 58, HOPEWELL 40

BOYS
WATAUGA 77, EAST GASTON 75 (OT)
HICKORY 67, ST. STEPHENS 59 (OT)
FRED T. FOARD 89, PATTON 48
GARINGER 52, SOUTH CALDWELL 49

CLASS 2A
GIRLS: SURRY CENTRAL 87, ASHE COUNTY 53
BOYS: TRINITY 75, ASHE COUNTY 33

CLASS 1A
GIRLS: AVERY 60, ROSMAN 48
BOYS: AVERY 75, CHEROKEE 64

Photo Courtesy: Kaelin McNeill, Bill Sheffiled