Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High football team turned it over five times Friday night and suffered the consequences as Hibriten blasted the Pioneers 55-21 in a first-place showdown in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference at Jeff Storie Memorial Stadium in Lenoir.

The Panthers (7-0 overall; 3-0 NW3A/4A) had 499 yards of total offense, including 397 on the ground. Quarterback Michael Isbell, a part-time starter who took over for the injured Jamichael Walton, backboned the attack.

The senior ran for two touchdowns, threw a touchdown pass, ran for 129 yards and had 231 yards of total offense.

“They just have an offense that’s tough to stop,” WHS coach Tim Pruitt said. “We were chasing them down most of the night. And when we met them head-on, we didn’t tackle. They’re just a good football team.”

But it looked like a possible shootout in the first quarter as the teams traded touchdowns on their initial possessions. The Panthers marched 55 yards in seven plays, and scored on Tripp Patterson’s ten-yard run for a 6-0 lead less than four minutes into the game. It took WHS only 1:19 to come charging back. A 49-yard kick-off return by Trey Kavanaugh gave WHS possession at the Hibriten 46. It only took three plays for WHS to score. A 35-yard pass from Devan Corum to Clint Trivette gave WHS a first down inside the ten. And Logan Smith scored on the very next play on a nine-yard run. Alex Parson’s extra-point gave WHS a short-lived 7-6 lead.

From that point on it was all Hibriten as the Panthers scored 35 unanswered points. WHS aided the issue with two crucial fumbles in the final 31 seconds of the first half. Trailing 20-7, a

fumble set up Patterson's two-yard run; and the Pioneers mishandled the ensuing kick-off setting up Isbell's 18-yard scamper with seven seconds left in the first half, and a 34-7 lead.

"That was the difference in the game," said Hibriten coach Chuck Cannon. "WHS has a solid football team, but those two fumbles allowed us to pull away."

Baker Stanley led WHS with a career-high 77 yards rushing and a touchdown. Smith (ankle) and Jordan Pineda (hip flexor) both left the game in the third quarter with injuries. The Pioneers take on Fred T. Foard in their Homecoming game next Friday night. Our coverage begins at 6:30 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

In other games:

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Fred T. Foard 24, St. Stephens 17
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