The Watauga High football team, playing its final regular-season home game at Jack Groce Stadium, put on a memorable performance Friday night.

The Pioneers defeated Hickory 34-17 and nailed down the No.3 seed in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference. The win also gives WHS (6-4 overall; 3-2 NW3A/4A) a priority seed when the playoff pairings are announced Nov. 7.

“It was a must-win for us,” said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. “Everything fell in place for us tonight, and we’re in a very good situation.”

And if the Pioneers can win at St. Stephens next week, they could possibly host a first-round playoff game. Remember what happened in 2002, when the Pioneers were 7-4 in the regular season and finished in third in the old NW4A Conference. They received a seventh seed and hosted a first-round game against R. J. Reynolds.

WHS didn’t waste any time putting Hickory (5-5; 2-3 NW3A/4A) away. The Pioneers, who nearly muffed the opening kick-off, marched 95 yards in 16 plays and scored on Logan Smith’s three-yard run. The drive took 7:25 off the clock.

“Our offensive line, the tight ends and the backs blocked real well all night long,” Pruitt said. “We just executed and moved the ball. It was a good night, especially for our offensive line.”

The Pioneers had 341 yards offensively, including 219 on the ground. Devan Corum had a monster night, and he also made a strong argument for Player of the Year honors in the NW3A/4A as he racked up 246 total yards. He was 7-11 for 122 yards passing with three touchdown passes----all of those to Travis Oliver, and he also ran for 124 yards on 26 carries.

“We got together after our loss at Alexander (Central) last week, and we were determined to win the rest of our games,” said WHS junior Mo Gore. “There is no quit in this team. We’ve earned everything this year.”

Oliver finished with five catches for 113 yards. Defensively, the Pioneers held Hickory to 174 yards, including 92 on the ground. Sophomore running back Shaquan Reid, who has produced four 100-yard games this season, was held to 18 yards on seven carries.

The Pioneers also beat Hickory for the first time since 1965, and for only the second time in 14 tries in this series. Defensively, Caleb Watson had an interception and a fumble recovery, both coming in the third quarter. And both produced touchdowns that allowed WHS to build a 27-10 lead going into the fourth quarter.

The highlight for Hickory occurred just before halftime, when senior Patrick Smith booted a Jack Groce Stadium record 42-yard field goal as time expired in the first half. That kick eclipsed a 41-yard field goal by WHS kicker Sava Kostis in 2007. Kostis is currently a sophomore and on the wrestling team at Appalachian State University.

The Pioneers wrap up the regular season at St. Stephen’s next Friday night. Our coverage begins at 6:30 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

In other games:

Hibriten 45, Fred T. Foard 7

Alexander Central 28, South Caldwell 3

NOTES: Alexander Central nails down the No.1 seed in the 4A division; Hibriten nailed down the No.1 seed in the 3A division. Those two square off for the No. 1 overall seed next Friday night.

Mountain Heritage 35, Avery 14

Ashe County 51, Forbush 6