Written by Mike Kelly
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The Watauga High men's and women's basketball teams stumbled Saturday in Marion against an old conference foe in McDowell.

In the women's game, McDowell (2-0), a former member of the old Northwestern 4A Conference and now a member of the Mountain Athletic 3A/4A Conference, blasted WHS 79-38 at Titans Gym. The Titans scored the game's first 18 points and coasted home.

Xandi Gellman and Autumn Ward did most of the damage. Those two combined for 29 points in the first half (Gellman had 15; Ward had 14, including four three pointers) as the Titans, who led 29-5 after one, held a commanding 50-16 lead at the break.

"Plain and simple, we weren't ready to play," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "It was the worst thing that could happen against someone like McDowell. We never got started. "The only good thing about today's game is that it wasn't a conference game."

WHS (0-2) did outscore McDowell 17-13 in the third quarter, but the Titans still led by 34 after three.

"We showed some heart in the third quarter," Anderson said. "We could have quit, especially with the score the way it was, but I just told the girls to forget the scoreboard and to concentrate on every possession. And we did that for the most part."

Nicole Tesh led WHS with 12 points. Kristina Rees had eight points. Mariah Corbin, who finished with six points, suffered an ankle injury in the third quarter. She was helped off the court, and she had her ankle wrapped in ice on the bench. Gellman led four players in double-figures with 19 points. Ward finished with 16.

"I was trying to build some momentum for Tuesday night (when WHS entertains T.C. Roberson)," Anderson said. "This one just got away from us in a hurry. Is McDowell 30 or 40 points better than us. No. But they are a good team. "And that's why I want to play them. Teams like this get you ready for conference play and the state playoffs, when it really counts."

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McDowell 90, WHS 71

The WHS men (1-1) didn't fair much better. As was the case in the women's game, McDowell (2-0) used an 18-0 run between the first and second quarters, built a 20 point halftime lead and coasted home beating the Pioneers, 90-71.

WHS, thanks to Damian Edwards who found his scoring touch in the opening quarter, led 17-11 with 3:41 left in the period. Edwards, who only scored two points in a season-opening win against Ashe County Tuesday night, had 12 points in the opening stanza as he buried four three pointers. But from that point on, it was all McDowell.

The Titans, who only won eight games last season, methodically pulled away and led 34-18 with 4:59 left in the first half. The Pioneers, who only scored ten points in the second period, didn't score their first field goal until the 2:27 mark on a running one-hander by Josh Coffey. But the Pioneers never seriously threatened McDowell the rest of the way.

The Titans led by as many as 23 points, and the Pioneers never got closer than 16 at 71-55 with 4:59 to go. The Titans had five players in double figures. Chavis Hamilton led the way with 18 points, 13 of those in the second half. Brandon Dockery, who fouled out with 5:18 left in the game, and Dakota Arrowood each had 14 points. Tyler Hopkins and Randall Conley each had 11; Eli Miller, who fouled out with 6:49 to go in the final stanza, had ten.

Edwards paced WHS with a season-high 20 points, but only four of those points came in the second half, and all of them were free throws. Jake Pifer had his best game as a Pioneer with a career-high 14 points, all of those coming in the second half. Coffey finished with 11. The Pioneers have now lost three consecutive games in Marion.

Both the WHS men and wome return home to play T.C. Roberson Tuesday night. Our coverage begins at 6:05 pm on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The WHS JV girls pulled off a huge win as they beat McDowell, 43-40. Brooke Rhoades led WHS (4-0) with 17 points; Anna Church had 13. McDowell beat the JV boys 53-25. The JV boys are 1-3.

In other games:

Women: Ashe County 53, Alexander Central 25
Men: Alexander Central 32, Ashe County 30