The Watauga High men's basketball team saw its magical season come to an end Friday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym.

In the final game ever played in the old building, the Pioneers dropped a 93-78 decision to West Charlotte in the sectional championship game. It was Watauga's first trip to the Sweet 16 in 39 years. The last time they did it was way back in 1971. when Carter Lentz led WHS to 20 wins (they were 20-4 that season) and the Western Regionals.

Lentz, who has been a member of our Pioneers' basketball broadcasts for a number of years, was honored before Friday night's game for his accomplishments. Former coaches and players were on hand for the ceremony. Lentz, the winningest coach in WHS history, was 198-138 from 1965-1980. He also coached at Blowing Rock High School for 16 years before Watauga County consolidated its schools.

"What a great honor for a great man," said WHS coach Rob Sanders. "Coach Lentz has always been very supportive of me. We felt this ceremony was a great way to honor him for all he's done, and it was also a great way to say good-bye to this building."

That ceremony inspired the Pioneers (16-9). They held the lead for the entire first quarter, and even built a seven-point advantage against the highly-favored Lions.

Junior Will Koppenhaver led the charge as he poured in 11 points. Koppenhaver had his best game to date with a career-high 24 points to go along with eight rebounds.

But West Charlotte (21-9) came to life in the second period and took control. The Lions outscored WHS 32-8 in the period and led 46-24 at the intermission.

A 10-0 run sparked by senior J.T. Terrell put WHS on the ropes. Terrell, who led all scorers with 39 points, including eight threes, was fouled by Casey Quinn on a three-point shot attempt with 2.7 seconds left in the first half. And following that call, the WHS bench was assessed a technical foul.

Terrell made three of five free-throws, and on the ensuing possession, he buried a long-range three from 25 feet away to put the Lions up by 24 at the break.

"That was tough," Sanders said. "We knew at halftime that it was going to take a lot to come back. But our guys never gave up. They kept fighting. They came in believing they could win this game, and they just kept fighting."

The Pioneers made a couple of runs in the second half, but they never got any closer than 13 points. Senior Josh Coffey, playing his final game for the Pioneers, had 18 points in the loss, 15 in the second half. Brandon Calhoun, playing his final game, finished with 11.

"We had a great season," Sanders said. "Of course, we're disappointed it ended tonight. But I am very proud of these players. It's tough to say good-bye, especially to our seniors. But all these guys worked hard to make this season so special."

West Charlotte will advance to the Class 4A Western Regional in Greensboro. The Lions will play Lake Norman in the semi-final round. Lake Norman advanced by beating Myers Park 60-58

Friday night. West Charlotte defeated Lake Norman in the finals of the I-Meck Conference tournament to earn the No.2 seed in the state playoffs.

****

In other games:

WOMEN:

4A
Lake Norman 67, A.C. Reynolds 63 OT
McDowell 58, Hopewell 49 OT

3A
Forestview 70, Freedom 31

1A
Mitchell 67, East Wilkes 54
Avery 68, Robbinsville 67 OT

MEN:

3A
Hunter Huss 51, Freedom 45
Hibriten 61, Lawndale Burns 59

2A
West Caldwell 66, Pisgah 56

1A
Hendersonville 68, North Wilkes 57
Nantahala 66, Mitchell 62