

Pioneers Fall Short In Season Opener

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 20 August 2011 01:51

The Watauga High football team had an impressive showing in its season opener Friday night against state powerhouse A.C. Reynolds.

The Pioneers held the Rockets, who were ranked third in the state in Class 4A, to 207 yards of offense. Unfortunately, the Rockets (1-0), despite playing without their best player, running back A.J. Marion (knee injury), defeated WHS 21-14 at Jack Groce Stadium. It was ACR's fourth consecutive win against the Pioneers, and their tenth in 12 tries. But the last three games between these teams have been decided by 22 points. Senior Ethan Greene turned in a stellar effort at quarterback.

He was 21-31 for 272 yards and a touchdown. He hooked up with Ethan Poulos on a 55-yard strike with 7:28 to play in the third quarter that tied the game at 7-7.

Poulos finished with seven catches for 105 yards; Brian Bolster complemented Poulos as he caught five passes for 105 yards.

"We've (Ethan and Brian) have been playing together since middle school," Greene said. "So we know each other pretty well. Those guys make it easy for me. They run very good routes, and they can catch the ball. It was a great effort. I'm sorry we didn't win."

But a costly turnover by Greene in the third quarter gave ACR excellent field position at the WHS (0-1) 20-yard-line. Greene got caught up in traffic and lost the ball. Dan Searcy recovered for the Rockets.

Seven seconds later, quarterback Levi Ledford hooked up with Jacob Cagle on a 20-yard scoring pass in the far corner of the end zone for a 13-7 lead. Adding to their woes, the Pioneers' defense made two crucial mistakes on a time-consuming drive by the Rockets that basically put the game out of reach.

The Rockets were facing third and 30 at their 30-yard-line. But a personal foul penalty against the Pioneers moved the ball near midfield, making it third and 15. Ledford hooked up with Cagle on a 16-yard strike and a first down on the very next play at the WHS 41.

A few plays later, with the Rockets facing a second and 20 at the Pioneers' 45, Ledford hooked up with Jaelen Pruett on a swing pass. Pruett was wide open on the play, turned it up field, and raced in for a 19-7 lead with 6:46 to play. Ledford, a sophomore making his varsity debut, was 12-14 for 112 yards with two touchdown passes.

"Our defense played great," said WHS senior Alex Fox. "But we had a couple of breakdowns against those guys, and they took advantage of it. I didn't see what really happened on the personal foul call, but we just broke down as a team on that drive."

A safety made it 21-7 before the WHS defense stiffened and the Pioneers put together their best drive of the game. WHS marched 70 yards in 13 plays. Will Morgan scored on a one-yard run with 48-second left to make it a seven-point game. But the on-side kick attempt failed and the Rockets ran out the clock.

"I really don't want to throw it 31 times a game," said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. "But sometimes you have to do it. Our kids had a heck of an effort tonight, but we just gave up some big plays that hurt us in the end."

"But A.C. Reynolds has some good players. Their quarterback Ledford is a special kid. He was limited making his first varsity start, but he was impressive. But I thought we played well. We

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just gave up a couple of big plays."

The WHS running game was non-existent Friday night. The Pioneers were held to minus three yards rushing on 28 attempts. Greene was WHS's leading ball carrier with 27 yards on ten carries.

"Their defense was very fast," Greene said. "They really came after me tonight. But we made some big plays against them. They gave us the short stuff and we jumped on it."

Tommy Burns, who got the start at running back for ACR in Marion's absence, was the leading ball carrier. He finished with 117 yards on 20 carries. He scored the game's first touchdown on a 68-yard run in the first quarter.. But as a team, the Pioneers held the Rockets to 95 rushing yards on 32 attempts (2.9 yards-per-carry).

David Martin, playing his first game for the Pioneers, led WHS defensively with 11 tackles, including two tackles-for-loss. Colin Augustine had ten stops, a quarterback sack and three TFL. The Pioneers travel to Ashe County Friday night. The Huskies (1-0) pounded West Caldwell 41-6 in their season opener Friday night in West Jefferson. The Pioneers have won nine in a row against the Huskies. Our coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM

SCORING:

	1	2	3	4	T
ACR	7	0	6	8	- 21
WHS	0	0	7	7	- 14

1ST QTR:

ACR: BURNS 68-YARD RUN (METCALF'S KICK) , 7-0

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3RD QTR:

WHS: GREENE 55 YARD PASS TO POULOS (PARSON'S KICK), 7-7

ACR: LEDFORD 20 YARD PASS TO CAGLE (KICK FAILED), 13-7

4TH QTR:

ACR: LEDFORD 45 YARD PASS TO PURETT (PASS FAILED)), 19-7

ACR: TEAM SAFETY, 21-7

WHS: MORGAN 1 YARD RUN (PARSON'S KICK), 21-14

STATISTICS:

ACR:

FIRST DOWNS: 12

RUSHING YARDS: 32-95

PASSING YARDS: 112

TOTAL YARDS: 207

RUSHING: BURNS 20-117-1

PASSING: LEDFORD 12-14 112-2

RECEIVING: PRUETT 5-30=1; SEARCY 3-41

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WHS:

FIRST DOWNS: 13
RUSHING YARDS: 28--3
PASSING YARDS: 272
TOTAL YARD: 269

RUSHING: GREENE 10-27
PASSING: GREENE 21-31-272-1
RECEIVING: POULOS 7-105-1; BOLSTER 5-105