

Pioneers Silence Red Tornadoes

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 24 September 2011 11:20

The Watauga High football team is off to its best start in four years. The Pioneers (4-2 overall; 2-0 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) defeated Hickory 6-0 in a NW3A/4A Conference game at rainy Frank Barger Stadium Friday night. Kyle Chambers scored the game's only touchdown on a two-yard run in the second quarter. From there, it turned into a defensive struggle, that strongly favored the Pioneers.

WHS held the Red Tornadoes (3-2-1; 0-1) and their explosive offense to just 135 yards. And the Pioneers smothered Hickory's vaunted running game to a meager 72 yards. The Pioneers also pitched their first shutout in 17 games (the Pioneers blanked Ashe County 35-0 in last season's season opener on August 20) and their third shutout in three years.

Hickory quarterback Kyle Johnson was on the receiving end of that assault. He was thrown for 16 yards in losses and he only completed five passes for 63 yards. Johnson was second in the league in passing with 617 yards coming into Friday night's game.

"I'm really proud of our kids," said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. "It shows where our kids have come from. We lost 42-0 here last year, but our kids really worked their tails off during the summer preparing themselves for this season. And those efforts showed tonight."

The Pioneers are off to their first 2-0 start in league play since 2008, and they picked up their first win ever at Barger Stadium. The Pioneers sacked Johnson six times. And Johnson, considered one of the best quarterbacks in the league, felt the brunt of that pass rush in the third quarter.

The Red Tornadoes took their first possession of the second half and marched from their ten-yard-line to the WHS 11. But consecutive quarterback sacks pushed the Red Tornadoes back to the 28, and on fourth down, Johnson's first down pass attempt came up short at the WHS 12.

"I'm not in this for revenge," Pruitt said. "You've got to have a short memory in this business. I'm real proud of our defense, especially our defensive backs. They did a great job of keeping the ball in front, and we did a great job bringing pressure on Mr. Johnson tonight. He's one of the best quarterbacks in our league."

WHS scored the game's only touchdown with 6:07 to play in the first half. The Pioneers kept the Red Tornadoes bottled up deep in their own territory for the majority of the first half. The Pioneers, who squandered two scoring chances in the first half, finally broke through on their third attempt.

They marched eight plays in 44 yards; Chambers scored from the two for a 6-0 lead. The Red Tornadoes blocked the extra-point attempt. Chambers, who was second in the league in rushing averaging 111-yards-per-game, was held to 69 yards on 28 carries.

"And those were tough yards," Pruitt said. "He didn't have time to dance around back there. It was a case of just hitting the hole and using his power to attack the (defensive) line. That's why we went to a conventional set. It gave Kyle some momentum hitting the line."

The Pioneers also did some hitting of their own. The Red Tornadoes didn't cross midfield, and they didn't pick up their first first down until eight seconds remained in the second quarter. A 26-yard toss from Johnson to Jordan Walls-Davis gave the Red Tornadoes a first down at the WHS 21. But a 37-yard field goal attempt by James Mitchell with time running out was wide

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right preserving WHS's six-point, halftime lead.

"It's a sweet win," Pruitt said. "But it's only the second step on the ladder. It's a great time to be a Pioneer, and I hope the kids in our community see that. Look at David Martin and Aaron Smith. They came out this season and they've really contributed."

WHS, riding a three-game winning streak (their longest winning streak since 2008, when they won four in a row), overcame four turnovers. But the Pioneers also forced a pair of Hickory turnovers, and both were costly. The first one came late in the first half at the WHS 33, the second one came on Hickory's final possession of the game with 29 seconds left.

A lateral was mishandled by the Red Tornadoes and Taylor Shuford recovered it at the Hickory 23.

"Our defensive front is very aggressive," Pruitt said. "They really get after it. But the strength of our team is at linebacker. You've got three seniors back there, and you've got Colin (Augustine) and those guys made a lot of plays tonight. I'm excited where our defense is, but we just got to keep working."

Cody McKinney made the biggest play of the on Hickory's next-to-last possession of the game. He dropped Johnson at the WHS 46 setting up a fourth-and-two with less than two minutes to play. The Red Tornadoes went for it on fourth down and Corey Stinson was dropped short at the 45 setting the stage for WHS's first win at Barger Stadium.

"I never knew the man (Frank Barger) personally," Pruitt said. "But I knew his son, Ray, a little bit when I was at Starmount and he was at West Wilkes. And like his dad, Ray was a great, competitive guy, and to win a game at Barger Stadium means a lot to me."

The Pioneers return home next Friday night to play Elizabethton (TN) in their final non-conference game of the season. Our coverage of that game begins at 6:30 p.m. from Jack Groce Stadium on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Frank Barger, who coached at Hickory from 1953-1984 won 230 games and three state titles.....The Pioneers are 3-13 against the Red Tornadoes, but they've won two of their last three meetings between the schools.....Defensive back Cameron Baker did not play Friday night because of a shoulder injury. Corey Beldon started in his place.....Alex Parsons missed a 31-yard field goal in the third quarter. He's 2-4 on field-goal tries this season.....WHS has given up 102 points this season, an average of 17 points-per-game.....Elizabethton, which plays WHS Friday night, lost to Sullivan South 28-27 in Kingsport, TN., Friday night. The Cyclones have lost two in a row. They're 3-3. Friday night's matchup at Jack Groce Stadium will be the first meeting ever between the schools.

SCORING:

	1	2	3	4	T	
WATAUGA				0	6	0 0 - 6
HICKORY				0	0	0 0 - 0

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1ST QTR - NO SCORING

2ND QTR - WHS: CHAMBERS 2-YD RUN (KICK BLOCKED), 8-44 6-0

3RD QTR - NO SCORING

4TH QTR - NO SCORING

STATISTICS:

TOTAL YARDS - WHS 120, HICKORY 135

RUSHING YARDS - WHS 94, HICKORY 72

PASSING YARDS - WHS 26, HICKORY 63

FIRST DOWNS - WHS 12, HICKORY 8

TURNOVERS - WHS 4, HICKORY 2

PENALTIES - WHS 1-18, HICKORY 6-55

RUSHING:

WHS: CHAMBERS 28-69-TD, GREENE 13-21

HHS: REID 8-32, LOCKHART 7-29, STINSON 7-27

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PASSING:

WHS: GREENE 3-6-26-2INT
HHS: JOHNSON 5-9-63

RECEIVING:

WHS: POULOS 1-10, BOLSTER 1-8, CHAMBERS 1-8
HHS: WALLS-DAVIS 3-52

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS

WATAUGA ████████████████████ **2-0**; ██████ **4-2**
SOUTH CALDWELL 2-0; 5-1
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 2-0; 3-3
HIBRITEN 0-1; 3-3
HICKORY 0-1; 3-2-1

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FRED T. FOARD 0-2; 1-5

ST. STEPHENS 0-2; 1-5

FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES:

WATAUGA 6, HICKORY 0

SOUTH CALDWELL 44, ST. STEPHENS 7

ALEXANDER CENTRAL 45, FRED T. FOARD 0

DAVIE COUNTY 56, HIBRITEN 12

OTHER GAMES:

AVERY 52, THOMAS JEFFERSON 34

WEST WILKES 31, ASHE COUNTY 0

MAIDEN 40, WEST CALDWELL 6

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