

## Pioneers Crush Indians To Win NW3A/4A Crown

Written by Mike Kelly

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The Watauga High volleyball team avenged its only conference loss of the season on its biggest stage of the year.

The Pioneers (18-7 overall; 11-1 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference), in front of a huge crowd, defeated St. Stephens in four games: 23-25, 25-20, 25-13, 25-19 to win the NW3A/4A title on Senior Night at Lentz-Eggers Gym. It was WHS's fourth consecutive conference title dating back to 2008, and the third time they've won the championship outright (WHS shared the title with Alexander Central in 2009).

"Our crowd was great," said WHS coach Kris Hagaman. "The students really came out and supported us. What an effort by our girls, especially the seniors. We just wore them out. They really wanted this on Senior Night. They wanted to win the championship on in their final home game of the regular season."

Kristen Carter and Skylar Hicks, who missed the first match between the schools on September 27 because of injury, had stellar nights against the Indians. Carter finished with 51 assists and Hicks had 35 digs. Hannah Stewart, Colby Combs, Anna Church and Rebecca Hayes were extremely strong around the net. Stewart finished with 18 kills, Combs had 15 kills, Church and Hayes each had ten. Church also had 14 digs; Combs had nine digs and five blocks; Stewart had ten digs.

"Our seniors just played terrific," Hagaman said. "We came out and made some errors in the first game and lost, but the girls really regrouped and took over the match. They just stepped it up. They knew what this game meant. The conference championship was on the line, and they wanted it."

The Pioneers have won three in a row since they were swept in tri-match with Ardrey Kell and Hough back on October 8.

"When we play well, we're a tough group," Hagaman said. "When we make mistakes, it costs us the match. We've been pretty consistent in our last few matches. And with the playoffs coming up, we're starting to play well at the right time."

The Pioneers will open the state playoffs at home Saturday against a wildcard team. The playoffs pairings will be released by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association later today.

WHS won the JV match in a two-game sweep, 25-21, 25-22. Whitney Dunnigan had 15 assists and six aces, Sarah Combs had ten assists, Kiersten McClannon had four blocks, six kills and three aces, Meredith Farthing had seven kills and sophomore Mariska Watts had eleven kills and three blocks. Mariska Watts is the younger sister of former WHS pitcher Jake Watts, who is currently a freshman at Milligan College in Johnson City, TN.

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### WHS SOCCER WINS BIG ON SENIOR NIGHT

The Watauga High soccer team celebrated Senior Night on a blustery, rainy night at Jack Groce Stadium by blanking South Caldwell, 5-0.

Zack Helms, who scored three times for the hat-trick, scored ten minutes into the match. Will Voss, who also had three assists, scored six minutes later for a 2-0 lead. Berkley Wilcox also scored and Jesus Morales had an assist.

"All the seniors scored tonight," said WHS coach Woody McKay. "And that's the way it should be on Senior Night. The conditions weren't great, but our guys played really well. It was a nice win."

The Pioneers (14-4-1 overall; 7-2-1 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) also posted their 12th shutout of the season. The Pioneers travel to Hibriten Monday night. A win there, and WHS will clinch second place in the NW3A/4A.

WHS won the JV game, 3-0. Justin Hall scored twice to pace the Pioneers; Leo Aguilar scored the other WHS goal. Canyon Mueller had an assist.