

Pioneers Win Big On Senior Night

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 22 October 2011 11:01

The Watuaga High football team had a Senior Night to remember.

The Pioneers (6-4 overall; 4-1 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference), who had struggled offensively in recent weeks, erupted for a season-high 42 points as they blasted Hibriten 42-31 at frigid Jack Groce Stadium Friday night. And appropriately, it was the senior class that stepped up big when the game was on the line.

Running back Kyle Chambers ran for a career-high 253 yards on 40 carries and scored twice. He became the first WHS running back since Eric Breitenstein in 2007 to run for 1,000 yards in a season; quarterback Ethan Greene rambled six yards to put the Pioneers on top to stay, 35-31, with 4:10 left in the game; and with the Panthers (4-6; 1-4) marching at the WHS 32-yard-line, linebacker Alex Fox intercepted a pass and returned it 74 yards for the game-clinching score with 42 seconds left.

The win was also WHS's first win against the Panthers since 2006, and the first time the Pioneers have beaten Hibriten at home since 2001. The loss also clinched Hibriten's first losing season since 2006. And Friday night's win allowed WHS to clinch second place in the conference standings. South Caldwell won the conference title by beating Alexander Central 29-0 in Taylorsville.

"It was a great game and a great team effort," said WHS coach Tim Pruitt. "We put up a lot of points against a very athletic team. But our seniors really stepped up when they had to. I've been coaching for 20 years or more, and I've seen a lot of senior classes. And this one has been outstanding. They really worked hard to put us in this position. This is a game they will remember for many years to come."

Friday night's win also avenged a 45-0 loss against the Panthers in 2010, something that didn't sit too well with many of the WHS players, especially the seniors.

"We really wanted this game," Fox said. "All the seniors really played great tonight. Victor Hamby, Adam Uschelbec, the guys on the offensive line blocked really well. Kyle had something like 40 carries and he put this team on his back, and carried us through this game." The game had its anxious moments as it see-sawed back-and-forth all night long. The Pioneers fell behind early on Jordan Rutherford's 73-yard run on Hibriten's first possession of the game. But WHS responded thanks to a four-yard run by Chambers, and a 64-yard fumble return by Collin Augustine that gave the Pioneers a 14-6 lead with 1:44 left in the opening stanza. Augustine actually intercepted an option pitch from Rutherford and raced into the end zone untouched, but it was ruled a fumble recovery. The Panthers responded and regained the lead, 19-14 with 7:52 left in the first half on Julius Gaines 28-yard scamper. But WHS engineered a ten-play, 77-yard drive that culminated with Chambers scoring his second touchdown of the game on a four-yard run and a 21-19 lead. Then the Pioneers pulled off an on-side kick that Nick Williams recovered at the Panthers' 34. It was actually a pooch kick that produced a convenient bounce for Williams.

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WHS eventually punched it in with 13 seconds left in the first half on a one-yard run by Greene for a 28-19 halftime lead. But the Panthers rallied again. A one-yard run by Rutherford on Hibriten's first possession of the second half, and a 26-yard scoring pass from Rutherford to Jose Muniz gave the Panthers a 31-28 lead with 10:18 left in the game (that scoring pass capped off a nine-play, 98-yard drive after WHS turned the ball over on downs at the Panthers' two-yard-line). It also set the stage for WHS's game-winning heroics.

"Hibriten has the best offense in this league," Pruitt said. "They're simply loaded, and they have outstanding speed. We gave up a lot of points and a lot of yards, but our defense really stepped up. We forced some turnovers and produced points off those turnovers."

Thanks to Fox, Augustine and that special-teams play by Williams, the Pioneers scored 21 points off those miscues. A strong pass rush with the game on the line led to Fox's interception and game-clinching touchdown.

"It happened so fast," Fox said. "All I saw were linemen, and then the ball came in my direction. I caught it and took off. I've never run so hard in my life. I didn't want to get caught. When I got around the 20-yard-line, I looked back and there was nobody there. Winning this game is one of the happiest moments I've ever experienced."

Rutherford paced Hibriten with 188 rushing yards and three touchdowns; he also threw for 81 yards and a score. The Panthers had 468 yards of total offense against the No.2 defense in the NW3A/4A Conference.

"The changes we've made from the coaching staff to the players has been so surreal," said senior Will Morgan. "We have a great group of guys. And our seniors were determined to turn this program around, and we've done a great job doing that this year. This team tonight had great wheels. We haven't seen this type of speed in a while. Even Hickory didn't have that kind of depth and talent. But coach (Preston) Clark said our defense made plays when we had to and that was the difference in the game."

The Pioneers wrap up the regular season next Friday night on the road at St. Stephens, a team that's beaten them the last two years. Our coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM. The state playoff pairings will be announced next Saturday, October 30.

NOTES: Place-kicker Alex Parsons was 6-6 on extra-point tries.....Chambers now has 1,092 rushing yards this season.....The last time WHS defeated Hibriten was in 2006 by a 22-14 score in Lenior.....The last WHS win at home was a 7-0 victory at the old Jack Groce Stadium. Matt Proffitt scored the game's only touchdown; Mike Hudson was the head coach.....Ironically, 2001 was also the last time Hibriten failed to make the state playoffs.

SCORING: □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ **1** □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ **2** □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ **3** □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ **4** □□□□□□□□□□

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HIBRITEN	6	13	6	6	-	31
WATAUGA	14	14	0	14	-	42

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SCORING SUMMARY:

1st 07:53 HHS Jordan Rutherford 73 yd run (Jonathan Bumgarner rush failed),
2 plays, 75 yards, TOP 0:49 6 - 0

04:13 WHS Kyle Chambers 4 yd run (Alex Parsons kick), 7 plays, 71 yards, TOP 3:33 6 - 7

01:44 WHS Collin Augustine 64 yd fumble recovery (Alex Parsons kick), 6 - 14

2nd 11:09 HHS Jordan Rutherford 7 yd run (Germaine Davenport rush failed),
6 plays, 65 yards, TOP 2:35 12 - 14

07:52 HHS Julius Gaines 28 yd run (Jacob Vasquez kick), 4 plays, 48 yards, TOP 1:20 19 - 14

02:41 WHS Kyle Chambers 4 yd run (Alex Parsons kick), 10 plays, 77 yards, TOP 5:01 19 - 21

00:13 WHS Ethan Greene 1 yd run (Alex Parsons kick), 7 plays, 33 yards, TOP 2:28 19 - 28

3rd 10:08 HHS Jordan Rutherford 1 yd run (Jordan Rutherford pass failed), 5 plays, 61 yards,
TOP 1:46 25 - 28

4th 10:18 HHS Jose Muniz 26 yd pass from Jordan Rutherford (TEAM rush failed), 9 plays, 98
yards, TOP 3:38 31 - 28

04:10 WHS Ethan Greene 6 yd run (Alex Parsons kick), 11 plays, 76 yards, TOP 6:02 31 - 35

00:42 WHS Alex Fox 74 yd interception return (Alex Parsons kick), 31 - 42

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TOTAL OFFENSE: WHS 350, HIBRITEN 468
RUSHING YARDS: WHS 293, HIBRITEN 387
PASSING YARDS: WHS 57, HIBRITEN 81
FIRST DOWNS: WHS 19, HIBRITREN 17
TURNOVERS: WHS 0, HIBRITEN 2
PENALTY YARDS: WHS 4-35, HIBRITEN 6-29
TIME OF POSSESSION: WHS 30:54, HIBRITEN 17:06
3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 4-9, HIBRITEN 2-4
4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: WHS 2-3, HIBRITEN 2-2

RUSHING:

WHS: CHAMBERS 40-253-2TD; GREENE 9-52-2TD
HIBRITEN: RUTHERFORD 12-188-3TD

PASSING:

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WHS: GREENE 4-7-57
HIBRITEN: RUTHERFORD 6-9-INT-TD-81

RECEIVING:

WHS: TRIVETTE 2-38
HIBRITEN: GAINES 3-29; MUNIZ 2-37-TD

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

SOUTH CALDWELL	6-0; 9-1
WATAUGA	4-1; 6-4
HICKORY	3-2; 6-3-1
ALEXANDER CENTRAL	2-3; 4-6
ST. STEPHENS	1-4; 3-7
HIBRITEN	1-4; 4-6
FRED T. FOARD	1-4; 2-7

FRIDAY'S GAMES

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WATAUGA 42, HIBRITEN 31

HICKORY 49, ST. STEPHENS 14

SOUTH CALDWELL 29, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 0

FRED T. FOARD - BYE WEEK

OTHER GAMES

T.C. ROBERSON 27, A.C. REYNOLDS 10

FREEDOM 55, CHASE 13

McDOWELL 41, ENKA 35

BANDYS 38, EAST BURKE 6

DRAUGHN 49, WEST CALDWELL 14

AVERY 49, MOUNTAIN HERITAGE 39

ASHE COUNTY 16, FORBUSH 11