

Pioneers Fall In Western Finals

Written by Mike Kelly

Wednesday, 02 November 2011 08:17

The Watuaga High volleyball team was eliminated in the Class 4A Western Regional championship game Tuesday night in front of a packed house at Lentz-Eggers Gym. The Pioneers (22-8), looking for their first trip to the state finals since 1998, dropped a four-set decision to Providence: 25-23, 18-25, 18-25, 20-25. The win sends Providence (29-2), which is ranked No.1 by MaxPreps.com, to the state finals for a second

consecutive year. The Panthers, the No.1 seed from the Southwestern 4A Conference, earned a second-place finish at state last season. They've won four state titles with the last one coming in 2005. The Panthers also snapped WHS's eight-game winning streak. The match turned in Providence's favor in the third set. With the match tied at a game apiece, the Pioneers built what seemed like a commanding 14-7 lead. But the Panthers put together a 10-0 run and took the lead for good at 17-14. That seemed to ignite the Panthers, who dominated the net from that point on.

"Once we got through the noise and their fans, we settled down and played our game," said Providence coach Karen Bradbury. "The atmosphere here was great, it was great for volleyball. It overwhelmed our girls a little bit, but we regrouped."

Alexandra Mayo and Casey Rieger backboned Providence with 11 kills each. Katherine Boguski had 14 assists, Maryanne Grayson had 12 assists, and Emily Franklin had eight blocks.

"They're a big team," said WHS coach Kris Hagaman. "Our girls got a little worried about getting their shots blocked. But we told them that they had to work around those blocks, or to use those blocks to their advantage. But I was real pleased with our effort. The girls played great. They played with a purpose."

And the Pioneers nearly rallied in the fourth and final game. Trailing 22-12, WHS put together a six-point rally and got within 22-18. But the Panthers survived the run and put the match away on Rieger's kill just inside the near sideline to end the match.

"I knew they would make one more run at us," Bradbury said. "They're scrappy like us. But we didn't panic. We just took it one point at a time. We didn't get caught up in the moment of their run."

Kristen Carter paced WHS with 44 assists; Hannah Stewart, playing on a bad knee, had 14 kills and seven digs; Colby Combs had 14 kills and three service aces and Anna Church finished with nine kills.

"I really thought we could beat this team," said Combs, who will sign her national letter of intent with Bluefield College Thursday. "They were tall, and they were pretty strong around the net. It really messed up our passing. We looked disorganized at times."

Channing Hagaman had 14 kills and nine digs, Rebecca Hayes finished with six kills and Skylar Hicks had 18 digs.

"It's disappointing we lost, but we had a great season," Hagaman said. "But Providence is an excellent team. They're probably the best team we've seen this year. But I really thought the girls played with them. But they eventually took over the match with their size. This was a great group, especially the seniors. We've been together a long time. It's going to be hard to say good-bye."

Providence will play Wilmington Hoggard in Saturday's championship game at the Reynolds

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Coliseum in Raleigh. Hoggard defeated Green Hope Tuesday night in a five game match, 3-2. "Coming from behind for us is nothing new," Bradbury said. "We've been down by as many as 12 points in matches during the playoffs this year, and we just battled back and won. Our girls just believe we can do it. But Watauga is what I expected. They're a very good team, and they're very good offensively. They really pushed us, but we started controlling the net and that played in our favor."

NOTES: Providence is the last team from the west to win a state title in 2005. The east has dominated the state meet by reeling off five state titles in a row. Providence was a state runner-up, losing to Roxboro Person in 2006, and to Apex last season.....The Pioneers are now 2-2 in regional championship games.

PROVIDENCE 3, WHS 1

25-23, 18-25, 18-25, 20-25

PROVIDENCE (29-2):

MAYO 11 KILLS, RIEGER 11 KILLS, FRANKLIN 8 BLOCKS, SPENCE 12 DIGS, EDWARDS 3 SERVICE ACES, GRAYSON 12 ASSISTS, BOGUSKI 14 ASSISTS.

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WHS (22-8):

HICKS 18 DIGS, STEWART 14 KILLS AND 7 DIGS, COMBS 12 KILLS AND 3 SERVICE ACES, HAGAMAN 14 KILLS AND 9 DIGS, CHURCH 9 KILLS, HAYES 6 KILLS, CARTER 44 ASSISTS.