

Pioneers Hold Off Avery, 61-54

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 03 December 2011 11:48

The Watauga High men's basketball team loves living on the edge. For the second game in a row, the Pioneers dramatically pulled out a close win

on the road in a hostile environment. WHS (2-0), which opened the season with an overtime win at Cloudland, knocked off Avery 61-54 Friday night at The Octagon in Newland.

A 12-0 run just before halftime wiped out an eight-point deficit and gave the Pioneers a 31-27 lead at the break. Senior Kyle Chambers put an exclamation point on the rally as he hit a fade away three with five-tenths of a second left in the first half.

"What can I say, this team has the moxie to win games like this," said WHS coach Rob Sanders, who is 15-0 lifetime against the Vikings. "I knew the parts were there, but could we put it together, that's was the question. And so far, the results have been good. I'm not completely pleased with the way we played tonight. We made our share of mistakes, but we didn't back down, either. We responded when we had to."

And the Ploneers also did it without their best player, Jake Pifer, who was on the bench in civilian clothes nursing an ankle injury. The WHS senior was injured at practice last Monday, when he landed wrong on the ankle.

"We never mentioned it before the game," Sander said. "I'm not accepting excuses because one of our top players isn't going to play. Like I told our guys, 'this is your chance to step up and show me what you can do.'"

And Ben Howser, who got the starting nod with Pifer on the bench, responded in a big way. The junior turned in a yeoman effort with 12 points before he fouled out with 45 seconds left in the game. He led the Ploneers in scoring with seven points in the first half.

"I couldn't be happier for Ben," Sander said. "He got the start and really responded. I thought he played a whale of game. He really gave us a spark late in the first half."

The Pioneers led 15-10 after one, but fell behind 27-19 with a little less than three minutes to play in the second quarter. Alex Villanueva sparked the Vikings (0-1) with ten first half points. He had a pair of slam dunks that ignited a 17-4 run and gave the Vikings their eight-point advantage.

"(Villanueva) is a great athlete," Sanders said. "He's going to win a lot of games for them. We really wanted to shore up our defense after the sloppy job we did last week at Cloudland. We worked all week on taking charges, but I was pretty upset with our guys, except for Chambers, in the first half. We weren't getting in anyone's way."

Despite that spurt by Villanueva and the Vikings, that 12-point run put the Pioneers on top to stay. They eventually built a nine-point lead at 39-30 late in the third quarter. The Vikings threatened a few times, but never got any closer than two points (and that happened with 45 seconds left in the game). With the score 54-51, Timmy Stewart was fouled by Howser on a three-point attempt. It gave Avery a chance to tie the game, but after making the first throw, Stewart missed the next two.

"(Avery coach) Bo (Manus) has done a heck of a job with that program," Sanders said. "Nothing comes easy against them. They make you earn everything. But we won tonight in tough environment without our best player. That's says a lot about the character of this team."

But the Pioneers continued their struggles at the free-throw line. WHS was 17-30 Friday night,

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and they're 36-63 (57%) for the season.

"I was telling Jake (Pifer) on the bench, we might have to shoot a thousand free throws at practice next week," Sanders said. "It's something we really need to work on. Free throws, especially in a close game, can take you a long way if you can make them."

Matt Proffitt led the Pioneers with 16 points and ten rebounds. He also had three steals. Allan Koppenhaver and Chambers each had ten points; Ben Margolis, who made five huge free throws down the stretch, finished with seven points. Ethan Poulos had two points, seven assists and three steals.

Villanueva, who fouled out with 16 seconds left, led the Vikings with 18 points. Timmy Stewart had 17. The Pioneers travel to West Caldwell Tuesday night.

WHS 61, AVERY 54

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WATAUGA 15 16 15 15 - 61
AVERY 10 17 15 12 - 54

WHS: POULOS 2 (7 ASSISTS, 3 STEALS), PROFFITT 16 (10 REBOUNDS), MARGOLIS 7, HOWSER 12, CHASTEEN 4, KOPPENHAVER 10, CHAMBERS 10.

AVERY: GREENE 1, VILLANUEVA 18, LYONS 7, PITTMAN 6, SHEILDS 2, STEWART 17, WOTELL 3.

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VIKINGS RALLY TO BEAT WHS, 60-52

The Watauga High women's basketball team raised a few eyebrows Friday night. Following a sub-par performance in their season opener on November 22 at Cloudland, the WHS women (0-2) gave Avery all it could handle Friday night before the Vikings rallied for a 60-52 win at The Octagon in Newland.

The Pioneers jumped out to an early 7-0 lead and led by as many as ten in the first half. WHS, which opened in a 2-3 zone defensively, also kept Avery's (1-2) best player, Megan Tennant scoreless in the first quarter.

"I could see the frustration on her face," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "That's why we opened in a zone. (Tennant) is so relentless. She's the foundation of their team. We couldn't let her dominate us inside. I thought we did a good job of denying her the ball."

That they did. And while Tennant was on an island searching for a helping hand, the Pioneers slowly pulled away and built a 21-11 advantage early in the second quarter. But the Vikings finally regrouped and came charging back to take a 26-25 lead just before halftime.

Tennant erupted for nine of her game-high 18 points in the second period. But WHS responded with a run of its own and regained a four-point lead at the intermission.

A three-pointer by Whitney Dunnigan at the horn gave WHS a 34-30 lead.

"In my five years at Watauga, that's the best first half of basketball we've ever played,"

Anderson said. "We made just one turnover in the first half. That's tremendous, especially for a young team like us. I am so proud of this team."

Dunnigan and Hannah Margolis paced the Pioneers in the first half with 13 points each.

Unfortunately, the Pioneers lost their scoring touch in the second half and scored all of 18 points in the stanza, including four points in the third quarter. That allowed Avery to jump on top for good. A three pointer by Kelsie Clark in the final minute of the third period gave Avery a 39-38 lead.

The Vikings stretched their advantage to nine points in the fourth quarter.

"Avery did what a good veteran team is suppose to do," Anderson said. "Once they got the lead, they knew how to close it out. They made their free throws down the stretch and kept the game out of reach. But I'm excited about this group. I know we lost, but we can take a lot of positives out of this game."

Margolis finished with a game high 19 points; Dunnigan had 16. Savanna Wood and Kaelin McNeill each had eight points. Tennant finished with 18 to place the Vikings; Clark finished with 12, Monica Estep had ten.

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The WHS men and women close out their season-opening, three-game road trip at West Caldwell Tuesday night. Our coverage of those games begin at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM. NOTES: Avery defeated the JV girls 58-38. Clare Harris led WHS (0-4) with 14 points in the loss.....the JV boys remained unblemished as the Pioneers (4-0) defeated Avery 57-32. Jake Chasteen led the Pioneers with 12 points and eight rebounds, Trevor Eggers had nine, Cameron Baker had nine rebounds, T.J. Poulos had four assists.

EVERY 60, WHS 52

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WATAUGA	20	14	4	14	- 52
EVERY	11	19	9	21	- 60

WHS: WOOD 8, DUNNIGAN 16, SEAMONE 1, MARGOLIS 19, McNEILL 8.

EVERY: CLARK 12, DELLINGER 6, RIGDON 3, HEATON 2, VANCE 1, ESTEP 10, BURELSON 6, TENNANT 18, BYRD 2.

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FRIDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

WOMEN:

AVERY 60, WATAUGA 52

NORTH IREDELL 61, ALEXANDER CENTRAL 49
ST. STEPHENS 40, BUNKER HILL 27
HICKORY 57, WINSTON-SALEM REAGAN 48
WEST CALDWELL 63, HIBRITEN 30
EAST BURKE 60, SOUTH CALDWELL 50
FRED T. FOARD 58, WEST LINCOLN 30

MEN:

WATAUGA 61, AVERY 54

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ALEXANDER CENTRAL 70, NORTH IREDELL 48
HIBRITEN 58, WEST CALDWELL 49
ST. STEPHENS 54, BUNKER HILL 45
EAST BURKE 74, SOUTH CALDWELL 66
WINSTON-SALEM REAGAN 54, HICKORY 50
FRED T. FOARD 76, WEST LINCOLN 44

MONDAY'S GAMES

SOUTH CALDWELL @ WILKES CENTRAL
NEWTON-CONOVER @ HICKORY
ALEXANDER CENTRAL @ WEST IREDELL