

Huskies Nip Pioneers, 54-53

Written by Mike Kelly

Thursday, 12 January 2012 14:02

The Watauga High men's basketball team has developed quite a rivalry over the years with Ashe County, especially since former WHS coach Marc Payne went back to his roots in West Jefferson.

These teams, year-in and year-out, have produced, nail-biting, edge-of-your-seat excitement time and time again. And Wednesday night's game

at the Dog Pound in West Jefferson was no exception.

The Huskies (13-1) rallied from a four-point deficit with 32 seconds left and defeated WHS 54-53 in a non-conference game. Nehemiah Stafford, who was fouled by Jake Pifer on a tough call driving to the basket, was the hero on this night as he sank two free throws with 1.2 seconds left to pull it out for Ashe County.

"It really could have gone either way," Payne said. "Anytime you have contact near the basket like that it can either be a blocking foul, or an offensive foul. Fortunately for us, it was called a blocking foul."

And Stafford, who has missed one free throw all season, did the rest by nailing the one-and-one and putting his team on top to stay. Andrew Lopp set the stage as he buried a three point shot with 22 seconds left that made it 53-52.

"Our five starters have been through these wars before," Payne said. "These guys put together an 11-game winning streak last year. They've a determined group. There's no quit in them. I don't care what the score is, these guys go after it.

"Nehemiah is a point guard and it was on him to create something. (WHS coach) Rob (Sanders) didn't want his guys to foul on that play. He wanted us to settle for a jump shot. So Nehemiah took it inside and created something."

It was quite a dramatic finish for the Huskies, who fell behind 53-49 on a bucket by Ben Margolis with 32 seconds left. Margolis, who finished with five points and gave WHS (6-8) one of his best efforts of the season in the fourth quarter, set up what seemed like the game-clinching basket as he poked the ball away from Lopp that led to his breakaway basket and a four-point lead.

"This was a great game, and our guys have no reason to hang their heads," Sanders said. "We made some silly mistakes at the end that cost us the game, but we held our own against a great team. I was real pleased with our defense, especially on Zeb (Richardson). We fronted him, and we had backside help. We never allowed him to take the game over."

Richardson finished with 21 points, but it was Stafford that grabbed center stage when the game was on the line.

"(Ashe County) has a lot of weapons," Sanders said. "We had a couple of chances to win the game at the foul line, but we couldn't hit our free throws." You're up by four, and you hit a couple of free throws, and you put the game out of reach. But we didn't and they capitalized on it."

The Pioneers, who led 26-22 at halftime, fell behind 34-28 in the third quarter, thanks to a 12-0 run by the Huskies. Sanders was also assessed a technical foul during that sequence. But Pifer buried an long-range three, tying the game at 38 after three. And the Pioneers came charging back to take the lead in the final stanza, only to fall short at the end.

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"We knew about Pifer's range," Payne said. "We just gave him too much room, and he nailed it. Rob's guys showed a lot of poise coming back after falling behind. And they really made us work tonight.

"Their defense took us out of what we like to do. Our passes were longer, and they really pressured the ball. As a matter of fact, they out-defensed us in the first half."

Stafford finished with 15 points, 11 of those in the second half. Sam Gammons had 11; Lopp finished with seven points. Pifer led the Pioneers with 16 points; Matt Proffitt had a stellar game with 11 points, five rebounds and three steals. DeWayne Mackey had six points.

NOTES: The Huskies, who swept the season series against the Pioneers, have won 13 in a row. The Huskies won 11 straight last season before they lost in the Mountain Valley 1A/2A Conference championship game.....It's also the third time the Huskies have swept WHS, and the first time they've done it since the 2008-09 season.....And Ashe County has also defeated WHS for the eighth time at home in the last ten years.

ASHE COUNTY 54, WHS 53

SCORE BY PERIODS 1ST 2ND 3RD 4TH TOTAL

WATAUGA	15	11	12	15	53
ASHE COUNTY	12	10	16	16	54

WHS: PIFER 16, STEURY 1, PROFFITT 11 (5 REBOUNDS, 3 STEALS), MARGOLIS 5 (2 STEALS, 3 ASSISTS), CHASTEEN 4 (6 REBOUNDS), KOPPENHAVER 2, STURGILL 5, MACKEY 6, CHAMBERS 3.

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ASHE COUNTY: STAFFORD 15, GAMMONS 11, LOPP 7, RICHARDSON 21.

WHS WOMEN BITTEN BY HUSKIES---AGAIN!!

Watauga High women's basketball coach Klay Anderson has seen his fill of Ashe County coach Laura Foster and her crew.

And who can blame him. Anderson, now in his fifth year as head coach of the Pioneers, is 0-10 against the Huskies, and that includes a 35-31 setback Wednesday night at the Dog Pound in West Jefferson.

Rubbing salt in the wound, the Pioneers haven't beaten Ashe County since the 2003-04 season---a span of 18 consecutive games.

The Huskies (5-9), who had lost five of their last six games coming in, went on an 8-0 run and built a 14-6 lead---their largest of the game---early in the second quarter. But they couldn't put the Pioneers, who never had the lead, away until the closing moments of the contest.

Three consecutive times, the Pioneers, thanks to sophomore Savanna Wood, got within a point, and three consecutive times, the Pioneers (3-11) let the Huskies slip away.

The final blow came in the fourth quarter. The Pioneers, who trailed 30-23, got within a point at 30-29 on a three pointer by Wood. But the Huskies, thanks to a layup by MacKinsey Johnson on a backdoor play with less than a minute to play, went up by three and never looked back.

Kayla Spears settled the issue as she made three free throws down the stretch sealing WHS's fate and handing the Pioneers their third consecutive loss.

The Huskies were led by Johnson, Morgan Hudler and Paige Spell, who each poured in eight points apiece. Wood finished with 12 to pace WHS; Hannah Margolis, who fouled out with six seconds left in the game, finished with nine.

The WHS men and women return home to play Hibriten (weather-permitting) Friday night. Our coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: Next Tuesday's game (January 17) at St. Stephens will start an hour earlier because of final exams. The JV girls take the floor at 3 p.m. The varsity women will play at 6 p.m. Our

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coverage next Tuesday begins at 5:30 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.....The JV girls (5-9) won their second game in a row as they knocked off Ashe County, 36-28. Clare Harris paced WHS with 14 points; Rachel Foutz and Courtney Edwards each had six.....The JV boys (14-0) remained undefeated as they blasted Ashe County 47-25. Trevor Eggers led the Pioneers with nine points; Eli Gales had seven points and three assists; Jay Harrell and Cameron Baker each had seven points.

ASHE COUNTY 35, WHS 31

SCORE BY PERIODS 1ST 2ND 3RD 4TH TOTAL

WATAUGA	6	7	10	8	31
ASHE COUNTY	6	11	11	7	35

WHS: WOODS 2, WOOD 12, DUNNIGAN 2, WALLACE 1, EPPLEY 3, MARGOLIS 9, McNEILL 2.

ASHE COUNTY: JOHNSON 8, HUDLER 8, SPEARS 3, SPELL 8, MAHLONEY 3, FLANAGAN 2, SHIPP 3.

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