

Pioneers Win Ugly, But They Win!

Written by Mike Kelly

Thursday, 19 January 2012 10:04

It wasn't pretty, but when you're struggling like the Watauga High men's basketball is these days, head coach Rob Sanders will take a win any way he can get it. And the Pioneers (7-9 overall; 3-3 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) rewarded their coach Wednesday night with a hard-fought

54-52 MUST-win against Hibriten at Lentz-Eggers Gym. It was only WHS's third win in its last 11 games; the Panthers (7-7; 1-5) have lost five in a row. The Pioneers have also beaten Hibriten three consecutive times dating back to last season.

"The sand in the hour glass is running out," Sanders said. "Pretty soon, it will be Senior Night, then the conference tournament, and hopefully, the state playoffs. Time is running short, so every game is so important. Tonight's win wasn't pretty by any means, but it was a win and that's all that matters."

The Pioneers, who fell behind 8-5 in the first quarter, put together an 11-point run and jumped on top 16-8 early in the second quarter. They eventually led by as many as 14 points before they settled for a 28-16 advantage at the intermission.

But the Panthers came charging back behind Michael Burgess, to start the third quarter.

Burgess, who was saddled with three fouls in the first half, exploded for 21 of his game-high 25 points in the second half. And the Panthers rallied behind their best player to take a 40-39 lead midway through the fourth quarter. The Pioneers aided the comeback by missing their first five free-throw attempts.

"Burgess is a great athlete, and what makes him doubly dangerous is that he can also shoot the basketball," Sanders said. "He can shoot it from the outside, or he can take it to the hole. We didn't stop his dribble penetration at all tonight. He did a great job getting his team back in the game."

Omar Chisholm's three pointer with 5:21 left to play gave the Panthers their brief one-point lead, but the Pioneers finally righted themselves at the free-throw line and regained the lead. A free throw by Jake Pifer tied the game at 40-40; and a free throw by Matt Proffitt moments later gave WHS the lead for good.

"And we did a great job on the boards," Sanders said. "We created those chances at the line, thanks to our aggressive approach inside. We took advantage of it by going to the line, and we finally starting making our free throws after a slow start."

A pair of free throws by Pifer gave WHS a 43-40 lead with 3:39 to go, and WHS eventually built its advantage to seven points, thanks to a steal and a two-hand jam by Pifer with 2:21 left that made it, 47-40. The Panthers never got any closer than the final margin.

"It's a big win for us," Sanders said. "We've gone through some tough times this season, but this group hasn't given up on (the coaching staff), or themselves. It would have been so easy to give up when things got tough down the stretch tonight, but these guys just kept fighting. And all that hard work paid off."

Pifer finished with 21 points and eight rebounds; Proffitt finished with 13 points and six boards. Pifer and Proffitt were also a combined 19-25 from the line in the second half.

The win also gives WHS sole possession of fourth place with a road game coming up against Fred T. Foard Friday night. A win there, and the Pioneers will climb above .500 in the league

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standings.

"And that's what we're shooting for," Sanders. "We just want to put ourselves in a position to contend in this conference. Tonight's win was big, but we have to build on it by winning Friday night. And that won't be easy, especially going against (Foard coach) Rob Bliss on his home floor."

Chisholm finished with 12 points for the Panthers; Jordan Rutherford had ten. The Pioneers travel to Fred T. Foard Friday night.

NOTES: Senior Kyle Chambers has been suspended indefinitely by head coach Rob Sanders for violating team rules.

WHS 54, HIBRITEN 52

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

HIBRITEN.....	8	8	14	22	52
WATAUGA.....	14	14	9	17	54

HIBRITEN: RUTHERFORD 10, MUNIZ 2, BURGESS 25, CHISHOLM 12, HOGAN 2, FELDER 1.

WHS: PIFER 21 (8 REBOUNDS), POULOS 4 (3 STEALS), PROFFITT 13 (6 REBOUNDS, 3 STEALS), MARGOLIS 5 (7 REBOUNDS), HOWSER 6 (6 REBOUNDS), CHASTEEN 3, KOPPENHAVER 2.

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WHS WOMEN MAKE IT TWO IN A ROW

The Watauga High women's basketball team seems to be turning the corner towards respectability.

Sure, the overall record doesn't look all that good, but the Pioneers (5-11 overall; 3-3 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) are back have reached the .500 mark in league play. And they've also nestled themselves into fourth place in the league standings.

The Pioneers got there by knocking off Hibriten 46-40 at Lentz-Eggers Gym Wednesday night. And the Pioneers are riding a two-game winning streak; the Panthers (4-10; 1-5), who haven't beaten WHS since the 1997-98 season, have lost four straight.

"You're not going to win a conference championship in the first half of the conference season," WHS coach Klay Anderson said. "But you can sure lose it. But like I've said before, we've put ourselves in a position to contend. We're currently the No.4 seed, and maybe, we can flirt with the possibility of moving up a little bit more in the standings."

And like they did Tuesday night at St. Stephens, the Pioneers took control by outscoring Hibriten 16-3 in the second quarter. That gave WHS, which trailed 8-6 after the opening eight minutes, a 22-11 halftime lead. And the Pioneers have also outscored their last two opponents 31-7 in the second quarter in their last two games.

"Games aren't always won in the fourth quarter," Anderson said. "Sometimes you can do it early, and the last two nights we've been able to take a commanding lead by halftime. We did a lot of good things to get there in the second quarter. We made our shots, we got the ball inside, and we showed a lot of patience offensively."

The Pioneers stretched their lead to 23 points, and led 42-19 after three quarters. But the Panthers came charging back in the final stanza. Led by Keisha Corpening, Hibriten got the lead down to seven points at 44-37 with less than a minute to play. But the Pioneers managed to hang on. The Panthers outscored WHS 21-4 in the frame.

"We just lost our focus," Anderson said. "We had the big lead, and our girls relax. My girls wonder why I preach on focusing all the time, and tonight was a perfect example. A couple of my girls were giggling on the bench when we had the big lead, and I told them, 'this game isn't over yet.' And to Monte's (Simmons, Hibriten's coach) credit, his girls came back and made a game of it."

Savanna Wood led the Pioneers with 17 points, including five threes. She just fell two shy of the school record of seven three pointers in a game originally set by Zack Greene in the 2007-08 season, and later tied by Chad Epply (later that year) and by Jake Pifer earlier this year.

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"When Jake got his seven threes earlier this year, the coaching staff and I were kidding Savanna about nestling herself in that record book," Anderson said. "She's a streak shooter, and when she's on, she is a big weapon for us outside."

Whitney Dunnigan, who fouled out with 61 seconds left, had eight points; Hannah Margolis had five. Corpening led Hibriten with 16 points.

"We've got a big one Friday night at Fred T. Foard," Anderson said. "They've got a very athletic team. We were fortunate to beat them up here (back on December 13). But now we have to beat them down there. But I'm confident in this group. Sure, we've had our ups-and-downs, but I feel we're playing with more confidence right now. And that's a good sign, especially at this time of the year."

The WHS men and women travel to Newton to play Fred T. Foard Friday night. Our coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM. The WHS women defeated the Tigers in Newton last season.

NOTES: The JV boys are 16-0 after they defeated Hibriten 58-25. Jake Chasteen had 16 points, Jay Harrill had 11. Cameron Baker had eight points and nine rebounds. Trevor Eggers had seven points.....The JV girls defeated Hibriten, 47-22. Ryan Loflin had 14 points; Clare Harris had 12.

WHS 46, HIBRITEN 40

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

HIBRITEN	8	3	8	21	40
WATAUGA	6	16	20	4	46

HIBRITEN: BOLGER 2, McRARY 4, SOLDATI 5, CORPENING 16, GREENE 2, MORTON 6, BRUCE 5.

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WHS: WOODS 3, WOOD 17, DUNNIGAN 8, WALLACE 1, EPPLEY 2, MARGOLIS 5, MAKAROVA 4, WILSON 3, WELSH 3.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT'S GAMES

WOMEN:

WATAUGA 46, HIBRITEN 40
SOUTH CALDWELL 65, WILKES CENTRAL 57

MEN:

WATAUGA 54, HIBRITEN 52
WILKES CENTRAL 56, SOUTH CALDWELL 53

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FRIDAY'S GAMES

(MEN & WOMEN)

WATAUGA @ FRED T. FOARD

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ALEXANDER CENTRAL @ ST. STEPHENS

SOUTH CALDWELL @ HIBRITEN

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