

Pioneers Clinch Playoff Berth

Written by Mike Kelly

Thursday, 09 February 2012 16:06

The Watauga High men's basketball team, regardless what happens in Friday night's third-place showdown with St. Stephens at Lentz-Eggers Gym, has clinched the No.2 seed among the Class 4A schools in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference and a berth

in the state playoffs. The Pioneers clinched their playoff bid Tuesday night when Alexander Central defeated South Caldwell. The Pioneers (9-12 overall), who are currently 5-6 in league play and tied for third place, will finish ahead of South Caldwell, which finished league play with a 4-8 record and in fifth place.

Even though the teams earned a split against each other during the regular season, the Pioneers earned the playoff spot based on their overall standing in the conference. The Pioneers have made the state playoffs six consecutive times and eight times in the last nine years (2005-06 is the last time they missed the state playoffs during that stretch).

The Pioneers, no matter what happens Friday night, will open the NW3A/4A Conference Tournament at home Monday night at 7 p.m. If they beat St. Stephens, they will clinch third place and play Fred T. Foard. If they lose, the Pioneers would finish fourth, and they would host South Caldwell.

The WHS women (6-15; 4-7) are a number five seed. They will open conference-tournament play at Fred T. Foard, the No.4 seed, Monday night at 7 p.m. The WHS women must win the tournament to guarantee themselves a state playoff berth. As of now, they could be a wildcard team, but Class 4A schools will only receive two wildcard bids in the state playoffs under the new pod system the North Carolina High School Athletic Association will use this year.

The men's and women's conference semifinals and finals will be played at Craft Gymnasium at Hickory High School. The women's semifinals will be played Tuesday night; the men's semifinals will be play Wednesday night; the men's and women's championship games will be played on Friday.

The state playoff pairings will be announced next Saturday, February 18; the state playoffs begin a week from Monday, February 20.

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE TOURNAMENT

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13

WOMEN:

#5 WATAUGA @ #4 FRED T. FOARD
#7 ST. STEPHENS @ #2 ALEXANDER CENTRAL
#6 HIBRITEN @ #3 SOUTH CALDWELL
#1 HICKORY - BYE

MEN:

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#5 SOUTH CALDWELL @ #4 WATAUGA/ST. STEPHENS

#6 FRED T. FOARD @ #3 WATAUGA/ST. STEPHENS

#7 HIBRITEN @ #2 ALEXANDER CENTRAL/HICKORY

#1 ALEXANDER CENTRAL/HICKORY - BYE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14 AT HHS

WOMEN'S SEMIFINALS, 6:30 & 8 P.M.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15 AT HHS

MEN'S SEMIFINALS, 6:30 & 8 P.M.

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17 AT HHS

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES, 6:30 & 8 P.M.