

Pioneers Fall In Season-Finale

Written by Mike Kelly

Saturday, 11 February 2012 12:54

Watauga County native Murphy Post spoiled his alma mater's Senior Night as St. Stephens outscored the Pioneers 21-9 in the third quarter and won going away, 68-56 Friday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym. The win also allowed St. Stephens (14-10 overall; 6-6 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) to clinch the No.3 seed in the NW3A/4A Conference standings. The Indians will open the conference tournament

at home Monday night against Fred T. Foard. The Pioneers, the No.4 seed, will open conference-tournament play at home Monday night against South Caldwell at 7 p.m.. The Indians have won four in a row against the Pioneers dating back to last season. "I really challenged our guys to come out and play hard in the third quarter," Post said. "Our goal, of course, was to win the conference championship, but Hickory and Alexander Central took care of us. Watauga is a quality team, and to come up here on Senior Night and win was huge for us. After we lost to Hickory on Tuesday night, we've really been emphasizing to our guys the importance of winning this game, and finishing third. No one gave us a chance to finish that high in the conference. It's a real source of pride to be able to hang our hats on that." The Indians were blessed with an accurate shooting touch from behind the three-point line, and a strong contribution from their bench. The Indians, thanks to Logan Starkey who buried five of them, nailed 12 threes, and the bench poured in 26 points.

"Logan was terrific," Post said. "He fell in love with the corner shot, and we set him up there consistently. We really shot the three well tonight. We normally don't do that, but tonight we got some great open looks and our shooters did the rest. As far as the bench is concerned, we really challenged those guys to back up the starters. The last time we play Watauga, our starters had to log a lot of minutes. Tonight, we were well balanced."

Logan Starkey finished with 15 points; Zach Houston poured in 15 and Drew Starkey, who battled foul trouble most of the night, finished with 11 points. Ben Howser, who fouled out with 4:50 left in the game, led the Pioneers (9-13; 5-7) with 13 points. Jake Pifer, who fouled out with 44 seconds left, had nine points and three steals.

Despite the loss, the Pioneers are still going to the state playoffs (for the eighth time in nine years, including a stretch of six straight appearances).

"But I'm not real happy with our record," Howser said. "I'm really down, especially to lose on Senior Night. But they were just kicking the ball outside, a lot like Avery does, and they had the open look. We just didn't have an answer for it. We couldn't stop it."

Watauga after falling behind 9-1 to start the game, rallied back to take a 28-27 lead at the intermission. But, like it's been all season, the wheels came off in the third quarter. The Indians outscored the Pioneers 21-9 in the third period and took a commanding 48-37 lead. Jordan James, who finished with nine points, hit a pair of free throws with 6:23 to play in the third quarter that gave St. Stephens the lead for good at 31-30. A 13-3 run, highlighted by a pair of threes by Houston and James, and a bucket by Drew Starkey from the right wing, gave the Indians a 42-33 advantage with 2:29 left in the stanza.

The lead grew to 16 points in the fourth quarter and the Pioneers never challenged again.

"We were real sharp in the third quarter," Post said.. "We made some crisp passes, and we only made three turnovers in the period. We created some good opportunities for ourselves, we

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made some big stops on defense, and we did a better job of keeping them off the glass." And the Indians also earned the No.2 seed among the Class 3A schools in the league. On the other hand, the Pioneers, who nailed down the No.2 seed among the Class 4A schools Tuesday night, go into post-season play having lost five of their last seven games. "We still haven't jelled as a team," Howser said. "We still haven't figured it out. I'm not satisfied, but at least we can still keep playing."

ST. STEPHENS 68, WHS 56

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

ST. STEPHENS.....	9	18	21	20	68
WATAUGA.....	8	20	9	19	56

STS: FARLEY 1, CRAIG 1, HEFNER 9, JAMES 9, HOUSTON 15, D. STARKEY 11, L. STARKEY 15, BUMGARNER 5, MOSS 2.

WHS: PIFER 9 (3 STEALS), POULOS 8 (3 ASSISTS), PROFFITT 6 (6 REBOUNDS), HOWSER 13, CHASTEEN 4 (5 REBOUNDS), KOPPENHAVER 4 (4 REBOUNDS), STURGILL 6 (6 REBOUNDS), MACKEY 6.

WHS WOMEN WIN SECOND STRAIGHT

The Watuaga High women's basketball team closed out the regular season on a positive note by knocking off St. Stephens 48-31 Friday night on Senior Night at Lentz-Eggers Gym. Savanna Wood gave WHS (7-15 overall; 5-7 Northwestern 3A/4A Conference) the lead for good at 3-2 on a three ball from the far corner with 4:09 to play in the opening stanza.

"It was 2-0 for the longest time," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "But Savanna hit a big shot for us, and that got us going. She's been doing that for us all year. She made the three that put us ahead, and she also made some nice passes that led to a pair of baskets. It was a great win, and a win is a win."

Wood finished with 13 points, eight of those coming in the first half. And the Pioneers, who methodically pulled away, led 9-4 after one, and 20-10 at the half. But Anderson wasn't real pleased with the performance.

"I got on them at halftime," he said. "Look at (North) Carolina and Duke the other (Thursday) night. The three ball can change things. We were up 20-4 and they scored the last six points of the quarter. That allowed them to get back in the game."

But the Pioneers settled the issue in the third quarter. They outscored St. Stephens 18-7 in the period and led 38-17 to start the fourth quarter. Hannah Margolis fueled the blowout by scoring 11 of her game-high 17 points in the third period. Margolis fouled out with 3:23 left in the game.

"Hannah turned in a solid effort as usual," Anderson said. "We stepped it up defensively, and set the tone. We closed the passing lanes, and scored a lot of transition baskets. We got a sizeable lead and never gave it up. It's a big win for us, especially with the conference tournament starting up Monday night. We've got (Fred T.) Foard, and we've beaten them once all ready this season. I'm not ready to finish the season just yet, and neither are my girls."

The lead eventually grew to 24 points in the fourth quarter on a pair of free throws by WHS's only senior Kalie Eppley, who finished with four points in the final home game of her career. It was also WHS's fourth straight win against the Indians. WHS, a No.5 seed, will open the conference tournament at Fred T. Foard, the No.4 seed, at 7 p.m. Monday night in Newton; The Indians, the No.7 seed, will open the conference tournament at Alexander Central, the No.2 seed, Monday night.

"Our overall record may not be impressive, but it's our conference record that counts," Anderson said. "We won five league games with primarily a junior-varsity team. But we've continued to improved."

Virginia McMahan, who fouled out with 13 seconds left in the game, led the Indians with ten points; Keyona Hicks had eight points.

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WHS 48, ST. STEPHENS 31

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

ST. STEPHENS..... 4 6 7 14 31

WATAUGA..... 9 11 18 10 48

STS: KERLEY 5, STARNES 1, THORNBURG 2, HICKS 8, MENARD 3, McMAHAN 10, SINGLETON 2.

WHS: WOODS 2, WOOD 13, DUNNIGAN 2, WALLACE 1, EPPLEY 4, SEAMONE 1, MARGOLIS 17, WILSON 2, McNEILL 6.

FRIDAY'S GAMES

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WOMEN:

WATAUGA 48, ST. STEPHENS 31
HICKORY 72, FRED T. FOARD 54
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 73, HIBRITEN 44
SOUTH CALDWELL - BYE

MEN:

ST. STEPHENS 68, WATAUGA 56
HICKORY 54, FRED T. FOARD 40
ALEXANDER CENTRAL 63, HIBRITEN 37
SOUTH CALDWELL - BYE

NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE STANDINGS

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WOMEN:

HICKORY (3A) 12-0; 23-1

ALEXANDER CENTRAL (4A) 17-6; 9-3

SOUTH CALDWELL (4A) 14-9; 8-4

FRED T. FOARD (3A) 13-10; 6-6

WATAUGA (4A) 7-15; 5-7

HIBRITEN (3A) 5-16; 2-10

ST. STEPHENS (3A) 2-21; 0-12

MEN:

HICKORY (3A) 21-3; 11-1

ALEXANDER CENTRAL (4A) 18-5; 11-1

ST. STEPHENS (3A) 14-10; 6-6

WATAUGA (4A) 9-13; 5-7

SOUTH CALDWELL (4A) 10-13; 4-8

FRED T. FOARD (3A) 13-10; 3-9

HIBRITEN (3A) 9-12; 2-10

JV BOYS GO UNDEFEATED

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The Watauga High junior varsity boys basketball team concluded its unblemished season by trouncing St. Stephens 45-25 Friday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym. The Pioneers (22-0) led 22-13 at the break, and broke game open in the third period as they built a commanding 32-17 lead. Matt Lambert and Jay Harrill led a balanced attack with nine points apiece. Cameron Baker finished with eight points and eight rebounds; Eli Gales had seven points, five assists and four steals.

The JV girls finished their season with a .500 record (11-11) as they defeated St. Stephens 34-26 Friday night. Clare Harris led the Pioneers with ten points. Rachel Foutz had eight points.