

UPDATED: Pruitt Steps Down As WHS Coach

Written by Mike Kelly
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There will be a new face pacing the sidelines on Friday nights at Jack Groce Stadium this season. Watauga High coach Tim Pruitt turned in his resignation on Monday morning. He met with his players last Thursday, May 31, informing them about his decision. Pruitt spent four years with the Pioneers, and he led them to their first winning season in four years last fall.

Pruitt was 21-27 during his tenure at WHS, and led them to the state playoffs three times in the last four years. Pruitt is 47-59 during his ten-year, head-coaching career, which includes stops in Cherryville (2002), West Wilkes (2003-07) and WHS (2008-11). The Pioneers also snapped a three-game post-season losing streak last fall by knocking off Alexander Central in the opening round of the state playoffs at The Groce.

And he led the Pioneers (7-6) to their first winning season since 2007. Pruitt's tenure as head coach officially expires on June 12. He is WHS's seventh head coach since 1996. Despite the resignation, Pruitt remains on staff as a physical education teacher at least until the end of June. The reason for the move, Pruitt and his wife, Maria, will be moving closer to family in the Cherryville area.

"It's really a move back home for both of us," Pruitt said. "And Cherryville is my wife's home town. Heck, it's where I met my wife before we got married. I can still remember where we were introduced. There's a lot of good memories there, and Cherryville is right in the corner of Gaston County, so Lincoln County and Cleveland County are right next door. It's a beautiful area, and we feel it's the right move for our family."

The Pioneers, who were considered an after thought when the season began, put together their most successful season since the Eric

Breitenstein era last fall. They not only produced a winning record overall, but they were 4-2 and turned in a second-place finish in the Northwestern 3A/4A Conference. Their most memorable game was a 6-0 win at Hickory on the road, September 23.

"We didn't have a large senior group, but those guys were special," Pruitt said. "And being they were my last group, those guys will stay with me for a very long time. We had a lot of fun with that group. They were extremely coachable, and they did a great job for us as leaders, both on and off the field."

The Pioneers were coming off back-to-back Final Four appearances when Pruitt took over in April of 2008. And despite some ups-and-downs, Pruitt feels he gave it his best shot.

"When I got to West Wilkes (in 2003), they had won something like three conference championships in a row," he said. "And the expectations were high when I got here. But we managed to put a competitive team on field for the most part every year. Sure, we had our struggles, but what coaches and teams don't. It's just part of the trade. It's like the changing of the seasons. Every year is different, but regardless of that, we've had some good players here. I don't want to start naming players because I might leave someone out, but we've had some great leaders here in my five years with the program. Yes, I say five years because I toss in the off-season workouts.

"The players I've had have shown a great work ethic. They were very dedicated to our program."

That dedication came to the forefront last season. The Pioneers showed off their will in the

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season opener against A.C. Reynolds. A huge underdog going in, the Pioneers kept the Rockets in check before they dropped a hard-fought 21-14 decision. That game, despite the loss, set the tone for the rest of the year.

"They were a determined bunch of players," Pruitt said. "They never backed down. That group could have easily gone 10-3. It's my last team, and it was a good way to go out. Now this year's group has some very good players on it. And the sophomore bunch behind them can be special. There's some very good football players up here.

"I really enjoyed my stay at Watauga. It's a great community, and it's tough to leave, but this is a family decision, not a Tim Pruitt decision."

Principal Marshall Gasperson intends to move swiftly to find a new head coach.

Photo Courtesy: Tim Pruitt, WHS Athletics