

Margolis, Welsh Lift Pioneers

Written by Mike Kelly

Tuesday, 20 November 2012 10:04

It was only the season opener, but it had the intensity of a state playoff game, especially down the stretch with the issue in doubt. In the end, however, the

Watauga High women's basketball team pulled it out by knocking off one of its biggest arch-rivals, the Avery Vikings, 48-45 Monday night at Lentz-Eggers Gym in the season opener for both teams.

And a pair of seniors teamed up on the biggest play of the game. With WHS (1-0) trailing 45-44, Hannah Margolis ran down a loose ball that was going out of bounds and saved it to Danielle Welsh, who hit the eventual game-winning shot with 11.1 seconds left to play.

"And that's what happens when you scrap and fight," said WHS coach Klay Anderson. "Hannah never gave up on that ball. She chased it down and found Danielle. I am so proud of my girls. They played so hard tonight, and they beat a good Avery team."

Margolis finished with a team-high 14 points and nine rebounds; Welsh finished with seven points. Savanna Wood had 11 points, including a huge three-point shot down the stretch that gave WHS a 44-42 lead. But Katie Rigdon responded with a three of her own with 31-seconds left that gave the Vikings a one-point advantage. That shot also set the stage for WHS' dramatic finish.

And the Pioneers also did it with a shorthanded lineup. Whitney Dunnigan is sitting out the season with a knee injury, and point guard Haleigh Wallace has a stress fracture in her right leg. Making matters worse, Jenna Woods, WHS' backup point guard, injured her right leg in the second quarter and did not return.

"And we won't know the extent of her injury for a while," Anderson said. "We were really counting on Jenna with Haleigh out. It put a lot on Hannah and Savanna. But we got some great contributions from our bench. Ana Makarova made two huge free throws in the fourth quarter. She's worked too hard to miss those shots, and she knocked them down. And Clair Harris played well in her first varsity game. I told her, 'welcome to the varsity level.' Contributions all the way around. We had to gut it out. Great, great win."

The Pioneers also did a great job keeping Lauren Burleson, Avery's (0-1) best player, in check. Burleson, who was never a factor in the game, finished with five points, and just one point in the second half.

"I'm a man-to-man defense kind of guy," Anderson said. "But I'm not going to do things right now that don't fit our style. Our bench is so short, we knew we couldn't play man-to-man defense a lot. And we knew what Avery had with Burleson and (Kelsie) Clarke, so we decided to push the tempo offensively. But we were also going to give them a lot of different looks defensively. Our goal was to make them shoot outside, and I really felt we did a good job boxing out in the second half. We gave ourselves a chance to win the game, and guess what, we won." Bree Heaton paced Avery with a game-high 15 points, including three trifectas, all of them coming in the second half. Rigdon finished with seven points; Haley Woody, who fouled out with 2:41 left in the game, had seven points and seven rebounds.

NOTES: It was WHS's first win against Avery since the 2010-11 season. That was also the last time WHS opened the season with a win.....Klay Anderson is 4-7 against Avery in his last 11 meetings.

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WHS 48, AVERY 45

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

AVERY	8	7	11	19	- 45
WATAUGA	16	3	9	20	- 48

AVERY: CLARKE 6, POLSGROVE 1, B. BURLESON 3, RIGDON 7, HEATON 15, RAMSEY 1, L. BURLESON 7, WOODY 7 (7 REBOUNDS). 25 REBOUNDS, 17 TURNOVERS.

WHS: WOODS 2, WOOD 11, MARGOLIS 14 (9 REBOUNDS), HARRIS 5, McNEILL 5, MAKAROVA 2, WILSON 2, WELSH 7. 29 REBOUNDS, 21 TURNOVERS.

PIONEERS MAKE IT 17 STRAIGHT AGAINST VIKINGS

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When it comes to playing Avery High, Watauga High men's basketball coach Rob Sanders has lived a charmed life. Sanders (107-98 record at WHS), now in his ninth year with the Pioneers, has beaten the Vikings 17 consecutive times dating back to the 2004-05 season. And the trend continued Monday night in the season opener for both teams.

The Pioneers (1-0) knocked off Avery 58-44 at Lentz-Eggers Gym. Ben Margolis led a balanced attack with 13 points and four steals; Ben Howser chipped in with ten points; Tyler Sturgill came off the bench and poured in 11; and DeWayne Mackey, making his debut at point guard, had eight points, nine assists and four steals.

The Pioneers led all the way. They built a 16-point advantage in the first half, and led by as many as 18 points in the second half. But WHS also had its anxious moments. Leading 34-18 at halftime, the Pioneers went through a scoring drought in the third quarter that nearly lasted seven minutes. But the Vikings (0-1) never got any closer than eight points.

"We were very fortunate," said WHS coach Rob Sanders, who picked up his 100th win against the Vikings last season at Lentz-Eggers Gym. "It was the same thing we experienced last year. We would go into a shell offensively, and that would allow teams to crawl back into the game. Luckily, our defense kept them in check tonight, and we were able to overcome it without any serious damage."

Mackey ended the scoring drought with a pair of free throws with 1:13 left in the third period. But the Vikings, who got within eight at 36-28, watched the Pioneers extend their lead to 13 points with a 5-0 run to close out the quarter.

The Vikings never got any closer than the final margin the rest of the way.

"We want to win every time we take the floor," Sanders said. "This was an important win for our guys, especially the J-V guys coming up. Those guys knew nothing but success a year ago (they were 22-0). There's that expectation of success, but if you lose your first game, it becomes a fix-it. Believe me, we have a lot to fix, but it's easier to do in practice coming off a win."

Sean Buchanan, who fouled out with 1:25 left in the game, led the Vikings with ten points.

Chance Watson, who fouled out with 2:06 left, and James Stewart each had six points. The loss also spoiled the head-coaching debut of Avery coach Scott Polsgrove.

"It was a nice win to start the season," Sanders said. "But we can't do this against Wilkes Central next (Tuesday). They always give us a good game, and they're very athletic. Our games with them always seem go down to the wire. Like I told our guys after the game, we can't take a quarter off and be sloppy with the basketball, or they will run us right out of the gym."

The WHS men and women entertain Wilkes Central next Tuesday night, November 27.

Coverage begins at 6 p.m. on Oldies 100.7 FM.

NOTES: The WHS JV girls defeated Avery, 36-23. Ryan Loflin led WHS with 19 points; Brooklin Carroll had eight points. The WHS JV boys defeated Avery, 59-27. Aaron Dobbins had 16 points and five steals; Utah Jones had seven points.

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WHS 58, AVERY 44

SCORE BY PERIODS 1 2 3 4 TOTAL

AVERY	8	10	10	16	-	44
WATAUGA	16	18	7	17	-	58

AVERY: WALDROP 2, WATSON 6, STAFFORD 2, CHILDRESS 4, STEWART 6, S. BUCHANAN 10, PHILLIPS 4, WOTELL 4, LOWERY 6. 18 REBOUNDS, 21 TURNOVERS.

WHS: STURGILL 9, GAILES 1, MARGOLIS 13 (4 STEALS), KOPPENHAVER 6, BAKER 7 (5 REBOUNDS), HOWSER 10, MACKEY 8 (9 ASSISTS, FOUR STEALS), LAMBERT 4. 27 REBOUNDS, 20 TURNOVERS.

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NORTHWESTERN 3A/4A CONFERENCE

MONDAY'S GAMES

WOMEN:

WATAUGA 48, AVERY 45

WEST WILKES 59, HIBRITEN 48

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MEN:

WATAUGA 58, AVERY

HIBRITEN 82, WEST WILKES 49

TUESDAY'S GAMES

MEN & WOMEN:

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DAVIE COUNTY @ ALEXANDER CENTRAL

ST. STEPHENS @ MAIDEN

Photo Courtesy: Danielle Welsh, Bill Sheffield